

Prophet's letters to go online

CAIRO (AFP) — Rare letters bearing the seal of the Prophet Muhammad will go onto the Internet soon, government newspaper Al Akhbar reported Friday. The project is being prepared by Cairo University's scientific heritage centre which obtained colour copies of these letters from the Topkapı museum in Istanbul. "The prophet... sent many letters to kings and princes who lived in the region around the Arabian peninsula inviting them to embrace Islam," project director Hamed Abdul Rahim told Al Akhbar. Prophet Muhammad, who could neither read or write, had the letters written for him by several people but all bore what Abdul Rahim said was the "Prophet's seal." Al Akhbar published pictures of four letters as well as the seal which reads in Arabic "Allah, Al Rasul, Muhammad" (God, the Prophet, Muhammad). Abdul Rahim acknowledged that some historians have cast doubt on the authenticity of the letters.

Jordan Times

An independent Arab political daily published by the Jordan Press Foundation
جوردان تيمز يومية سياسية تصدر بالانجليزية عن المؤسسة الصحفية الاردنية الراي.

Hamas gives PNA two weeks to free its leader

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AFP) — The military wing of the Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas, on Friday threatened to resume attacks against Israel if the Palestinian National Authority does not free the group's spiritual leader from house arrest in two weeks. "We give the Palestinian leadership until the end of Friday, Dec. 25 to lift the house arrest imposed on our leader, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin," said a statement from the Izzeddin Al Qassam Brigades. Hamas's armed wing. "If not, the Al Qassam Brigades will be free to undertake explosive attacks against the Zionist entity," the statement said, referring to Israel. Yassin, who on Wednesday started a hunger strike in solidarity with Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails, was placed under house arrest by Palestinian security forces after a suicide bombing at the end of October.

Volume 24 Number 7017

AMMAN SATURDAY, DECEMBER 12, 1998, SHA'ABAN 23, 1419

Price: Jordan 200 fils

Sudanese ruling party forms new leadership body

KHARTOUM (AFP) — Sudan's ruling National Congress has formed a new, single leadership body as the supreme authority ahead of the implementation of a new law on party formation next month, the SUNA news agency reported Friday. The agency quoted information Minister Ghazi Salah Eddin Atabani as saying that the 30-member Leadership Bureau had President Omar Al Bashir as chairman and Hassan Abdullah Al Turabi as secretary general. Previously the National Congress comprised a 650-member Consultative Council chaired by General Bashir and a separate 110-member Leadership Council chaired by Turabi.

U.S. to revive Lebanon, Syria talks with Israel

BEIRUT (AFP) — The United States is studying a formula to relaunch Israeli peace negotiations with Syria and Lebanon, the EU's Middle East envoy Miguel Angel Moratinos said Friday. Moratinos told reporters here that he had informed Lebanese President Emile Lahoud of his talks with U.S. officials in Washington "who are studying a formula to relaunch the two Lebanese and Syrian tracks with Israel." Moratinos, who arrived late Thursday in Beirut, said the European Union (EU) backed efforts to relaunch the peace talks. Israel's peace talks with Syria have been stalled since February 1996 while negotiations with Lebanon were frozen in 1994.

Miss Baghdad contest postponed indefinitely

BAGHDAD (AFP) — A beauty contest to select a Miss Baghdad, scheduled for Friday, has been delayed indefinitely because it did not get the proper government permit, organisers said. "The competition, which was to take place at the Saddam Centre for the Arts in Baghdad, has been cancelled because we didn't get the prior authorisation from the culture and information ministry," organiser Malik Jamil said.

Germany says hostages in Yemen are in good health

BONN (AP) — Four Germans being held hostage by tribesmen in Yemen are in good health and being treated well, the foreign ministry said Friday. Three German women and one man were kidnapped Monday by three gunmen from the Bani Dhabyan tribe in Marib province, 170 kilometres northeast of the capital Sanaa. German Ambassador Rainer Strachwitz talked to one of the female hostages by telephone and was told that all the captives were healthy, supplied with food and being treated well, ministry spokesman Martin Erdmann said. He said Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer has sent a note to his Yemeni counterpart, Abdulkader Bannam, urging Yemen to continue efforts to negotiate freedom for the hostages and not to use force. Yemeni security officials say the tribe abducted the Germans to force the government to pay them for the land on which it built a dam.

Two Palestinians killed in West Bank clashes

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AP) — On the eve of U.S. President Bill Clinton's arrival, Israeli troops opened fire Friday on hundreds of Palestinian demonstrators, killing two and injuring 27 during a protest against Israel's refusal to release prisoners.

The violence and Israel's tough positions concerning the Wye River peace agreement Clinton is coming to promote raised new concerns that the presidential visit will be plagued by problems.

Earlier Friday, Israel rejected a U.S. compromise on the release of Palestinian prisoners and also affirmed it will not withdraw troops in the West Bank unless the top Palestinian decision-making body holds a vote to annul clauses of the PLO Charter calling for Israel's destruction.

Friday's violence erupted just outside the West Bank town of Qalqilya. Witnesses said about 400 Palestinians threw stones at Israeli soldiers who fired tear gas, rubber-coated steel pellets and live ammunition to disperse the crowd.

Two 18-year-old Palestinians, Mohammad Suleiman and Kamal Adwan, were killed by live bullets in the head, said

officials at a U.N. clinic in Qalqilya. Another 25 were hurt by rubber bullets and two were wounded by live fire, clinic officials said.

The Palestinian protesters had gathered after Friday noon prayers to press for the release of Palestinian prisoners, a key point of contention between Israel and the Palestinian National Authority.

Israel has pledged to release 750 Palestinian prisoners in three stages by the end of January. The Palestinians have said Israel broke a promise to release prisoners held for anti-Israeli activities. Israel said it never made such a pledge, and accused the Palestinian Authority of incitement over the prisoner issue.

Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat said the United States offered a compromise, a trilateral committee to go over the list of prisoners one by one and determine who will be released.

But Israeli Cabinet Secretary Danny Naveh said Friday such a proposal was unacceptable. "Israel has not been offered such a compromise and there will not be such a compromise," Naveh said.

The other point of contention is Monday's meet-

ing of the Palestine National Council in Gaza City. Clinton is to address the PNC which, under the Wye agreement, is to reaffirm earlier decisions by lesser bodies to revoke PLO Charter clauses.

The Palestinians have said they would revoke the clauses only by acclamation, not by a vote as Israel has demanded.

With its insistence on a vote, Israel may be setting itself up for a showdown with Clinton. Under the Wye agreement, the annulment of the offending provisions by the PNC is to clear the way for an Israeli troop pullback. Clinton is unlikely to declare the PNC has not completed its task because that would mean his high-profile visit has been a failure.

However, Israeli officials said they would not drop their demand for a vote. "They have to vote in the PNC," said Israeli government spokesman Moshe Fogel. Otherwise, he said, Israel will not turn over additional West Bank territory to the Palestinians because "transfer of territory is irreversible."

In Washington, deputy U.S. State Department spokesman James Foley was evasive on whether the



A Palestinian worshipper leaving Friday prayers walks by Israeli police standing near one of the gates of Al Aqsa Mosque, Islam's third holiest shrine. Thousands of police reinforcements poured into Jerusalem on Friday ahead of U.S. President Bill Clinton's Saturday arrival (Reuters photo)

United States expected a vote from the PNC. "The procedures need to be clear enough that nullification has taken place," he said.

A senior Palestinian official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the United States has not asked Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat to consider holding a vote.

On Thursday, the Palestinians took an interim step when a smaller leadership body, the 124-member

Palestinian Central Council, declared the charter clauses revoked.

The 95 members present were asked whether they approved a letter in which Arafat informed Clinton that the charter clauses calling for Israel's destruction were null and void. In all, 81 voted in favour, seven against and seven abstained.

Asked about the decision, Arafat would only say that "it was a very important

and constructive meeting." The Palestinian leader also said he hoped Clinton would exert pressure on Israel to keep its obligations under the Wye agreement.

The PLO Charter was drawn up three decades ago, long before Israel and the Palestinians started their peace process in 1993.

The Palestinians say they took all the required steps to revoke the pertinent clauses at a PNC session in

Gaza in 1996.

However, Netanyahu has said the PNC never completed the job.

During the Wye River talks, the Palestinians agreed in a compromise to invite PNC members and delegates from other groups to Gaza to hear Clinton and Arafat speak.

The Wye accord says delegates should "reaffirm" the Arafat letter to Clinton, but does not specifically refer to a vote.

Palestinian opposition denounces charter changes

GAZA CITY (AFP) — Deputies in the Palestinian legislature on Friday joined members of opposition groups in denouncing the Wye land-for-peace agreement with Israel and changes to the Palestinian National Charter.

Some 500 people, including members of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas), Islamic Jihad and activists in the two main secular opposition groups, the Democratic and Popular Fronts for the Liberation of Palestine, banded together in a "national conference" in Gaza.

They publicly declared their opposition to October's Wye River accord with Israel and the ratification of amendments to the Palestinian National Charter approved the day before by a Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) interim body, the 125-member Palestinian National Council (PNC).

Eight members of the elected self-rule Palestinian National Authority (PNA) legislature took part in the conference, in addition to approximately 20 members of the PLO's supreme decision-making body, the Palestinian National Council (PNC), said conference convenor Abdullah Hourani.

In an open letter read by local Hamas leader Mahmoud Zahhar at the beginning of the conference, the opposition movements said that they "rejected" the Wye River agreement and called on the PNA to stop

"implementation of the accord, and in particular in the field of security."

The letter also called on Palestinian President Yasser Arafat to "stop negotiations and all forms of cooperation with the Israeli occupation forces."

In votes held during the meeting, the opposition groups called for Hamas' spiritual leader Sheikh Ahmad Yassin to be released from house arrest by the PNA.

On Wednesday Yassin, who has been under house arrest since the end of October, started a hunger strike in solidarity with Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails.

A Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) official said the

meeting participants also decided to boycott a speech which U.S. President Bill Clinton will give on Monday before members of the PNC and other Palestinian bodies meeting in Gaza.

The PCC, the second most senior body in the PLO after the PNC, voted on Thursday by a large majority of 81 members out of 101 present to confirm the cancellation of anti-Israeli clauses in the Palestinian National Charter.

Opposition groups argue that the PLO made a crucial mistake in recognising Israel's right to exist while the Jewish state rejects the right of Palestinians to self-determination.

Earlier, nearly a thousand Palestinian opposition members demonstrated in Nablus in the north of the West Bank against Clinton's visit to the Gaza Strip and West Bank due on Monday and Tuesday.

"Clinton, coward, go home to play with girls," about 800 protesters shouted in this northern West Bank town.

The demonstration was called by Palestinian opposition groups including Hamas, the DFLP and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), witnesses said.

The protest came at the end of Friday prayers, with demonstrators marching to a tent in the city centre where the families of Palestinian prisoners in Israel have been staging a hunger strike.

Relatives of Lebanese held in Syria appeal to new president

BEIRUT (AFP) — The relatives of hundreds of Lebanese detained without charge or trial in Syria addressed an open letter to new Lebanese President Emile Lahoud Friday urging their release.

They called on Lahoud to "work relentlessly for the liberation of our relatives." "We hope that you will pay more attention to their cause than your predecessor," their letter said. Former President Elias Hrawi left office Nov. 24.

Beirut newspapers said the letter was sent after internal security forces on Thursday prevented a gathering of detainees' families in front of a school in Hadath, near the presidential palace northeast of Beirut.

They had originally planned to head towards the presidential palace. A delegation of the relatives then met with Cardinal Nasrallah Sfeir, head of the Christian Maronite Church, who

has repeatedly called for the release of Lebanese detained in Syrian jails.

Solida, the French-Lebanese group following up the issue of Lebanese held in Syrian and Israeli jails, denounced the security forces for banning the families' protest.

Demonstrations and street protests have been banned by a ministerial decree since September 1993.

"The relatives wanted to organise a peaceful demonstration to attract the attention of the new president on the fate of their relatives detained in Syria and ask for his intervention," said a Solida statement published Friday.

In March, Syria released 121 Lebanese, many detained for more than 15 years without charge or trial, at the request of Hrawi.

Lebanese human rights groups claim that 228 Lebanese are still detained in Syria, mostly without charge.

Activists barred from attending Palestinian opposition meeting

By Tareq Ayyoub

AMMAN — Police on Friday barred political activists from leaving for Damascus to attend a conference organised by Palestinian opposition groups protesting President Yasser Arafat's plan to amend the Palestinian National Charter (PNC), Ibrahim Ajeb, a member of the Fateh Movement-Infidada said.

Ajeb said that the group of 32 was part of a 67-member delegation who were invited to attend the Damascus conference.

Interior Minister Nayef Al Qadi told the Jordan Times that the government will ban any person from travelling abroad if his/her trip will "constitute a threat to Jordanian interests."

"Jordanian citizens are allowed to travel to any place they wish, according to the law," Qadi said.

"But if we have information that a particular person's travel will endanger Jordan's interests and its relations with some countries, we will never hesitate to (bar him/her from travelling)," the minister said.

"If we have information that these persons will undertake activities that harm our relations with some countries, we will question them," Qadi added. The delegation, which includes members of leftist, Pan-Arabist and Islamic groups, were invited to attend the two-day meeting that starts today.

The PNC will convene in Gaza on Sunday in accordance with the Wye agreement between Palestinian and Israelis, which called among other things for scrapping articles in the PNC's Charter that call for the destruction of Israel.

A Jordanian government delegation will travel to Gaza this week to attend the PNC conference, which will be attended by U.S. President Bill Clinton.

Ajeb told the Jordan Times that political activists were told by border security to "report" to security authorities in Amman.

"This is a political decision aimed at preventing us from attending the conference," he said. "It is violation of our human rights," he said.

He pointed that only two members, Jawad Younis and Ahmad Younis, were allowed to cross into Syrian borders.

Meanwhile, police at the Queen Alia Airport banned political activist Laila Khalid from leaving for Beirut en route to Damascus to attend the conference.

"I was on a Lebanese Middle East Airlines plane which was getting ready to leave when Jordanian security came on board and made me get off without explaining why," Khalid told Agence France Presse.

Albright says 'military option remains' with Iraq

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said Friday "the military option remains on the table" if Iraq violates its promise to cooperate with U.N. weapons inspectors.

Albright and National Security Council Adviser Sandy Berger said the United States was reserving judgement until U.N. chief weapons inspector Richard Butler makes his report on Iraqi compliance early next week to U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan.

"We want to see this process play it's course," he added. Berger said the best option would be that U.N. inspectors would be allowed to do their job. If they can't, "then we're left to take our own action."

"If it can, that's so much the better," Berger added. "If it can't, then we will be faced with our own decisions about how to respond."

Albright said the United States would be "watching carefully" and that "it can go one of two ways."

There are some 20,000 U.S. troops in the Gulf region who could carry out any order for military action.

Albright and Berger spoke at a White House briefing about President Bill Clinton's trip to the Middle East, beginning Saturday.

Iraq appeared in defiance of its agreement when it refused to allow U.N. inspectors into the ruling Baath Party offices.

Defence Secretary William Cohen said

Thursday that Iraq's move created a "very serious situation," which still could prompt a no-notice military attack by the United States.

In a weekly report to the Security Council released Thursday in New York, Butler said Iraq not only blocked the search of the party office but also placed unacceptable conditions on photographing bombs at a chemical weapons monitoring site Saturday.

That same day, he said, Iraq tried to prevent videotaping and refused to answer questions during a biological weapons inspection.

In Damascus, meanwhile, Syria warned Friday against a U.S.-British strike on Iraq, saying it might kill innocent people and disturb the region. The warning was delivered by Syrian Vice President Abdul Halim Khaddam.

Speaking after talks with Iranian Vice President Hassan Habibi, Khaddam said: "We hope that no one will be involved in a military action against Iraq as this might cause serious damage to the Iraqi people and have negative repercussions on the whole situation in the region."

In separate remarks to reporters, Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi said his government and Syria's could not "stand idle vis-a-vis current developments" in Iraq.

He did not elaborate, but said that Iran believed in the unity of Iraq.

GOP leaders criticise Clinton's overtures to Palestinians

WASHINGTON (AP) — In advance of President Bill Clinton's visit to the Middle East, incoming U.S. House Speaker Bob Livingston and other Republicans complained Thursday that his pledge of nearly \$1 billion in U.S. aid to the Palestinians violates an earlier commitment to Israel.

Clinton's proposal for financial aid to support the Wye River agreement is subject to congressional approval. And Livingston and the incoming chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, Rep. Bill Young, both Republicans, protested Congress wasn't consulted.

The administration has pledged \$900 million over five years in U.S. economic aid to the Palestinians — and plans to ask Congress for a \$400 million installment early next year in an "emergency" spending bill.

This, together with administration plans to seek an additional \$1.2 billion for Israel and \$300 million for Jordan, "calls into question an earlier agreement with Israel to phase out most economic assistance to that region," Livingston and Young wrote Clinton.

"At the very least, we would ask you to consult senior members of the congressional leadership on both sides of the aisle before committing billions of taxpayer dollars to foreign governments," they said.

However, Livingston later told reporters he expected the spending bill to pass, despite his reservations.

Clinton's three-day visit was intended to dramatize support for the agreement he mediated in October between Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat at the

Wye River Plantation in Maryland. He will spend time in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza.

Many Israeli officials, and some members of the U.S. Congress, have protested the trip to the Palestinian-ruled areas, and it comes as Palestinian-Israeli violence is on the rise.

But White House spokesman Joe Lockhart said Clinton has no plans to postpone it.

"He believes that the trip is important to moving the process forward, to implementing the Wye River accords, and he's doing it in the best interests of the peace process," Lockhart said.

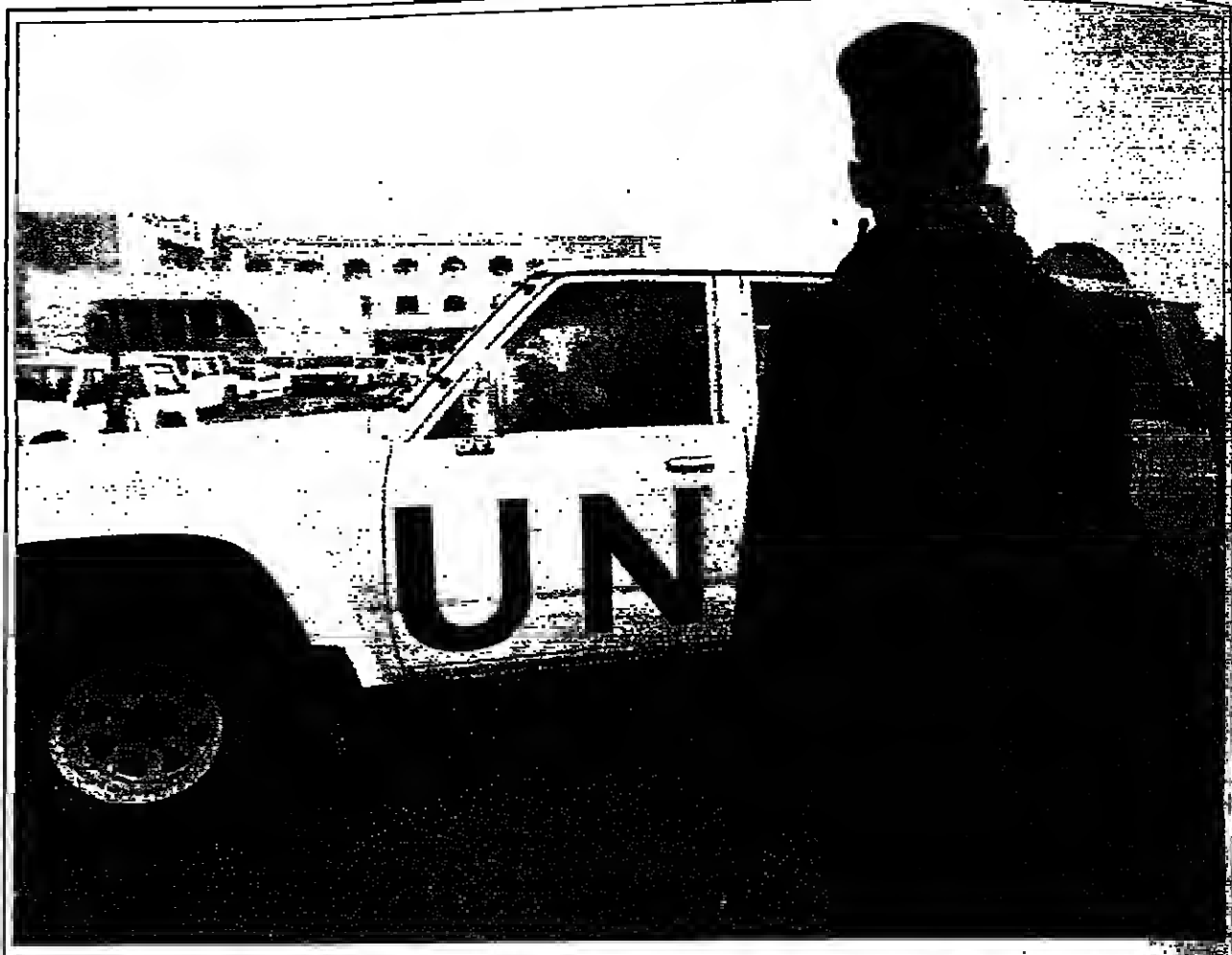
At the State Department, spokesman James Foley said, "Yes, there are bumps in the road. Yes, there are difficulties. But Wye, thus far, has been moving forward success-

fully."

A U.S.-Palestinian commission was established to channel the \$900 million in new American aid to the West Bank and Gaza over five years. The money is expected to be used for promoting business, along with cultural and scientific projects.

Livingston, meanwhile, in separate remarks to the National Jewish Coalition, a Republican organization, pledged the party "will not waiver" from "a total and absolute dedication to the security of Israel."

At the same time, Livingston said, "the Palestinian people have great needs, and you all must be considerate of their needs, because if they are simply abandoned... they can never achieve the stability that is necessary to keep them from threatening the security of Israel."



U.N. IN BAGHDAD: An Iraqi soldier Friday looks at a U.N. weapons inspectors vehicle driving out of the headquarters on a daily inspection. Iraq accused U.N. weapons inspectors of trying to create a new crisis Wednesday when the inspectors tried to carry out a 'provocative' inspection at a building in Baghdad linked to the ruling Baath Party (Reuters photo)

Annan rejects Israeli bid to delink Syria talks from Lebanon

UNITED NATIONS (AFP) — U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan on Thursday rejected an Israeli appeal to de-link peace talks with Syria from an Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon.

Annan held his first-ever meeting with Israeli Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon here, at the Israeli minister's request, U.N. spokesman Fred Eckhard said.

Sharon said in a statement that he had presented his "personal opinion" on south Lebanon, because the Israeli cabinet has not concluded consideration of the issue.

Sharon explained to Annan that "in my opinion there should be two concurrent actions — one, conducting peace negotiations [with Syria], and two, the decision on our withdrawal from Lebanon while holding Lebanon responsible for what takes place in its territory."

He reiterated that Israel was ready to conduct peace negotiations with Syria, in a reference to the Israeli occupation of the Golan Heights.

But "not, of course, from the point Syria is demanding, but from the point that everything is open to negotiation."

Sharon made similar points earlier Thursday

at a meeting in New York with U.S. Jewish leaders. But Annan told Sharon at their meeting here that "we cannot have comprehensive peace without Syria," Eckhard said. He described the meeting as "cordial and frank."

Annan also raised Lebanese concerns about night-time supersonic flights by Israeli aircraft over south Lebanon, where Israel maintains a "security zone," and where the United Nations has a peacekeeping force.

He asked Israel to show restraint, Eckhard said.

Regarding the Middle East peace process, Annan urged Israel to move forward, notably by refraining from building new settlements, and by releasing Palestinian prisoners as agreed in the six-week-old Wye River agreement.

He specifically mentioned Israel's decision to proceed with the construction of a settlement on Arab land in Arab east Jerusalem at Jahat Abu Ghneim, known to Israelis as Har Homa.

Sharon reiterated Israel's "firm insistence" that the Palestinians should "fully carry out their obligations in accordance with the determined timetable," the Israeli statement said.

Turkish court releases policemen in slain journalist case

AFYON (AP) — Drawing protests from human rights activists, a court Friday released five policemen from jail during their retrial in the beating death of a journalist.

The case is viewed as a test of Turkey's promise to crack down on abuses by its security forces.

The officers were sentenced to seven and a half years in prison in March for kicking, punching and clubbing a 27-year-old Mevlan Goktepe to death on Jan. 9, 1996.

But an appeals court ordered a new trial, saying the initial trial had failed to gather all the necessary testimony and evidence.

On Friday, Judge

Mustafa Birisik set the officers free ruling that most of the evidence has been collected. They were ordered not to leave the country.

The trial was adjourned until Jan. 29. Human rights activists joined Goktepe's family outside the court house to protest the decision to free the policemen.

A small leftist party, Freedom and Solidarity, accused the judges of "turning a blind eye" to abuses by security forces by releasing the policemen.

Lawyers for Goktepe's family have been pressing for a maximum sentence of 15 years for the officers.

Rights group urges investigation in Iranian writer's 'suspicious' death

AMMAN (J.T.) — Human Rights Watch (HRW) has urged the Iranian government to investigate the recent death of an Iranian writer under suspicious circumstances, an HRW statement said.

The body of Iranian poet, writer, and free expression advocate Mohammad Makhari was found Dec. 9 in a Tehran city morgue, HRW said. Marks on his head and neck made it appear that he had been murdered, possibly by strangulation, although no autopsy has yet been carried out.

This was the most recent in a series of deaths under suspicious circumstances of prominent critics of the Iranian government, according to the statement.

Makhari, who had last been seen alive on Dec. 3 going to a local shop, was briefly arrested with five other writers in October 1998. The four were threatened with and being charged for organizing "an underground political group" if they did not stop holding informal gatherings of writers.

Morgue workers reported the presence of Makhari's body to his family just two weeks after the body of another prominent writer

and political critic, Majid Sharif, was found dumped there on Nov. 24 after "disappearing" on Nov. 20. Sharif's articles criticizing government policies appeared in a monthly magazine, Iran-e-Farda (Iran Tomorrow), which was closed down by court order just six days ago.

In an open letter sent on Nov. 25 to Iranian President Mohammad Khatami, HRW expressed its shock about the killing by unknown assailants of opposition figures Darioush and Parvaneh Forouhar in their Tehran home on Nov. 22.

"These killings are an increasingly serious term of harassment and persecution of government critics in Iran," said Hany Megally, executive director of the Middle East and North Africa Division of Human Rights Watch. The killings have continued despite Khatami's public statements encouraging freedom of expression and his calls for investigations into the murders.

Megally urged the Iranian government to initiate an immediate and thorough investigation into this and other killings and make the findings public.

U.N. chief concerned by military reinforcement on Cyprus

UNITED NATIONS (AFP) — U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan expressed concern Thursday about military reinforcement on Cyprus where Greek-Cypriots are planning to deploy surface-to-air missiles.

"The continued upgrading of military equipment and infrastructure gives cause for concern," Annan said in a report to the U.N. Security Council.

He refused, however, to single out either of the island's factions, saying that "both sides continued to upgrade their military capabilities."

On the missiles, Annan said simply that "the arrival of S-300 surface-to-air missiles, which has been a matter of controversy for about two years, was postponed until the end of the year."

Cyprus has always maintained it would deploy the Russian-built missiles while Turkey has vowed to destroy them saying they are threat to its security.

The Greek-Cypriots insist that the missiles are purely defensive.

In his report, Annan recommended extending the mandate of some 1,200 U.N. peacekeeping

troops in Cyprus by six months until June 30, 1999.

"The presence of UNFICYP [the peacekeeping force] on the island remains indispensable for the maintenance of the ceasefire between the two sides," Annan said.

The U.N. troops have been on Cyprus since 1964.

LECTURE

Lecture by Iranian author Husham Sharif on the literary and political aspects of the Iranian Revolution, presented by Dr. Nabil Murrat at Darat Al-Funun, Jabbal Weibdeh, Sunday, Dec. 13 at 4:00 p.m.

Iran's parliament speaker condemns attack on Americans

TEHRAN (AP) — Iran's hard-line speaker of parliament said Thursday that last month's attack on a group of American visitors was "inappropriate," the official news agency reported.

But Ali Akbar Nateq-Nouri said a failure to explain the purpose of the visit also provoked "suspicion" about the delegation.

Vigilantes, wielding iron bars and throwing

stones smashed the windows of a bus carrying 13 foreigners, mostly Americans, on its way through Tehran.

"From what I have read, the members of the delegation were businessmen, who travelled in the name of tourists," the Islamic Republic News Agency quoted Nateq-Nouri as saying.

"We need sympathy and cooperation from all the officials," Nateq-Nouri added, stressing

the need to refrain from any provocation. "Violence has always been condemned and if it continues, it will lead to anarchy," he said.

It was the first time that a conservative within the ruling clerical hierarchy has spoken against the Nov. 21 attack.

President Mohammad Khatami, a moderate reformer who is engaged in a power struggle

with hardliners, condemned the attack as a national disgrace and "an insult to the government."

A radical Muslim group, Fedayeen Islam, claimed responsibility for the attack, saying it was directed at "U.S. spies" and those "who invited them" — an apparent reference to Khatami's call for cultural exchanges between Iran and the United States.

JORDAN TELEVISION

Tel. 4773111-19

PROGRAMME TWO

15:30 Animaniacs
15:30 The Adventures of the Bunch
16:00 Drama - Neighbours
16:30 Quiz Show - Peer Pressure
17:00 French programme - Faut Pas Revoir
18:15 Family programme - Wind at My Back
19:40 New in French
19:45 French Programme
19:50 News Headlines
19:55 Comedy - Murphy Brown
20:00 Doc - Today's Health
20:30 Drama - The Pretender
21:00 An ABC Democracy
21:20 Boston Pops Orchestra
22:00 News in English
22:30 Feature film - "Desiree"
23:59 Twisted
01:00 End of T.X.

PRAYER TIMES

04:59 Fajr
06:21 (Sunrise) Dhuhr
11:25 Dhuhr
14:14 'Asr
18:27 Maghreb
18:40 'Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church
Sweilieh, Tel. 5920740
Assembly of God Church Tel.
4652785
St. Joseph Church Tel.

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

4624590

Terra Sancta Church Tel.

4622366

Anglican Church Tel.

4624853/4624811

St. Afrem Syrian Orthodox

Church Tel. 4771751

Annan International Church

Tel. 5865897

German-speaking Evangelical

Congregation Tel. 5688404

The Evangelical Local Church

in Amman Tel. 5811295

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter

Day Saints Tel. 4654932

St. John the Baptist at De la

Salle College Tel. 5661757

Church of the Annunciation

Tel. 4637440

Greek Orthodox Church Tel.

4628052

Church of Presentation, Sweil-

ieh Tel. 5920146

The United Catholic Church

Tel. 4624757

The English-Language

Catholic Parish Tel. 4614190

Evangelical Free Church Tel.

4892679

The Baptist Church Tel.

4628052

The Armenian Catholic

Church Tel. 4771731

The Armenian Orthodox

Church Tel. 4775261

ment of Meteorology

Temperatures are expected to

rise slightly, skies cloudy, and

winds easterly to southeasterly

moderate. In Aqaba, skies will

be northerly moderate, and

seas calm.

Min/Max. temp.

Amman 05/16

Aqaba 12/25

Deserts 03/18

Jordan Valley 12/24

Yesterday's high temperatures:

Amman 14 Aqaba 23. Humid-

ity readings: Amman 37 per cent.

Aqaba 33 per cent.

Following are the temperatures

expected today in the following

areas:

Ajlun 06/13

Jerash 08/16

Um Qays 07/16

Madaba 06/15

Petra 08/16

Dead Sea 12/24

USEFUL

TELEPHONE

NUMBERS

NIGHT DUTY

AMMAN:

Dr. Khalid Asfour 5332600

Dr. Awad Al Hawamdeh 5332350

Dr. Tawfiq Qut'ain 4623029

Dr. Ghaleb Zaidieh 4126011

AMMAN:

Firas Pharmacy 5661912

Al Salam Pharmacy 4636730

Mayadah Pharmacy 5537004

Raka Al Dawa Pharmacy 5536169

IRBID:

Dr. Mohammad Al Shar' (02)7103588

Fou'ad Pharmacy (02)275360

ZARQA:

Dr. Akram Haddad (09)85550

Palestine Pharmacy (09)83562

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre 4637111

Civil Defence Department 5661111

Civil Defence Immediate Res-

cue 4630341

Civil Defence Emergency 199

Rescue Police 192, 4621111, 4637777

Fire Brigade 4617101

Blood Bank 4775121

Highway Police 5343402

Traffic Police 4896390

Public Security Dept. 4630321

Hotel Complaints 5603800

Price Complaints 5661176

Water & Sewage Complaints 4897467

Amman Municipality Com-

plaints 787111

Telephone Information (directo-

ry assistance) 121

Overseas Calls 0132

Central Amman Telephone

Repairs 4623101

Abdali Tel. Repairs 5661101

Jordan Television 4773111

Radio Jordan 4774111

Water Authority 5680100

J. Electricity Authority 5815615

Electric Power Co. 4636381

RJ Flight Information 4453200

Queen Alia Int. Airport 4453200

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:

The Arab Centre for Heart and

Special Surgery 5921199

The Islamic, Abdali 5666137

Husseini Medical Centre 5856856

Luzmila 4630195

Khalidi Maternity 4644281/6

Akileh Maternity 4642441/2

Jabal Amman Maternity 4642362

Malhas, J. Amman 4636140

Palestine, Shmeisani 5607071

Shmeisani Hospital 5607431

Jordan Hospital 5607550

University Hospital 5353444

Al-Mushter Hospital 5667279

Al-Ahli, Abdali 5664164/6

Italian, Al-Muhsineen 4771013

Al-Bashir 4775111/26

Army, Marka 4891611/15

Queen Alia Hospital 5157100

Arnal Hospital 5607155

Al Ansal Cancer Centre 5353000

ZARQA:

Zarqa Govt. Hospital

In statement marking declaration's 50th anniversary House expresses appreciation for roles of King, Regent in promoting human rights

AMMAN (Petra) — The Lower House of Parliament has expressed its deep appreciation of efforts by His Majesty King Hussein and HRH Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, to uphold and promote Jordan's human rights record.

In a statement issued to mark the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the House praised the endeavours of the King and the Crown Prince and their leading role at the international level to project the Kingdom's stand in upholding the declaration's principles.

The statement said Parliament supports the international community's efforts at the popular and official levels to bolster and strengthen the concept of human dignity, noting that it is committed to backing all

efforts aimed at safeguarding human rights and confronting practices that contravene human rights principles.

The House's statement voiced its support for objective initiatives designed to propagate awareness of and national efforts to bolster the concept and principles of human rights.

It emphasised Jordan's absolute objection to all practices that infringe on human rights, whatever the pretexts might be, adding that human rights principles are indivisible and are guaranteed by all religions and several international conventions.

The House condemned inhuman practices by governments that deprive people of their right to a decent and secure life, including imposing sanctions on states to achieve selfish interests.

In this regard, the House

said it declares its unwavering support for the people of Palestine, Iraq, Sudan and Libya in confronting all violations of these countries' human rights and denounces the on-going attempts on the part of certain nations to perpetuate the sanctions regimes that have had devastating consequences on people and their basic human rights.

The House called on regional and international organisations to shoulder their responsibilities in upholding human rights principles and exposing nations that threaten others and commit acts of aggression to achieve their interests.

The statement also urged Jordanian organisations to intensify their efforts to raise awareness among the public about human rights principles.

Delegation leaves for meeting in Tehran

Meanwhile, a parliamentary delegation Friday left for Tehran to take part in a meeting of parliamentarians from Islamic countries to work out a plan for creating an Islamic parliamentary union.

Taking part in the conference, which will be attended by representatives of 19 Arab and Islamic states, are Deputies Abdul Razzak Tubeishat, Khalil Atieh and Ahmad Khataib.

The delegation will deliver a message from House Speaker Abdul Hadi Majali to the head of the Iranian shura council on means of bolstering Jordanian-Iranian relations in parliamentary affairs.

The idea of creating an Islamic parliamentary union was floated in 1994, and a special committee has been formed to study its feasibility.

Jordan must invest more in helping disabled schoolchildren — official

By Hind-Lara Mango

BEIRUT — Jordan has to invest more to meet the needs of disabled schoolchildren and to integrate them into the educational system to minimise possible social and economic losses, a leading educationalist has said.

Munther Masri, director of the National Centre for Human Resources and former education minister, said only five per cent of the estimated 250,000 disabled children in Jordan were receiving special education.

However, he said contradicting figures on the exact number of disabled Jordanians were complicating efforts to mainstream such students into the country's strained educational system.

"Unless Jordan invests in and addresses the requirements of

children with special needs, this will result in large economic and social losses," Masri told the Jordan Times on the sidelines of a regional conference that concluded in Beirut on Monday.

"Schools need to be properly equipped to integrate these children in a comprehensive educational atmosphere," he added. Masri said the Kingdom's generally closed family structure, which is ashamed of "admitting that it has children with disabilities," was hindering efforts to collect exact data on the magnitude of the problem.

Jordan has over the past years established educational resource rooms equipped with facilities for children with special needs at several state-run schools, he said. However, a lack of adequately trained staff and teachers to address their

needs was complicating the process.

"Only a small portion of schools in Jordan have such facilities," he said.

Masri said 91 per cent of children between the ages of six and 16 were attending schools. "This means that there are tens of thousands of children who should be at school but are not," he added.

The two-day United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) regional seminar on "Reaching the Unreached: MENA's Basic Education Challenge for the 21st Century" ended with calls for the integration of disabled children into the mainstream educational system.

Thirteen Middle East and North African countries attended the parity, which ended on the eve of the launch of the UNICEF annual State of the World's Children Report.

Exhibition features 19th century artwork on the Holy Land

AMMAN (J.T.) — An exhibition of 57 paintings and photographs by 19th century British artists has attracted more foreigners than Jordanians.

Late last month, Britain's Prince Edward and Her Royal Highness Princess Rahma inaugurated "The Holy Land" display at the British Council in Amman as part of celebrations marking the council's 50th anniversary in Jordan.

The exhibition features mostly water colour paintings, lithographs and photographs of Holy Land (Jordanian and Palestinian) towns by famed British painters such as David Roberts, Edward Lear, William Holman Hunt, Carl Haag, David Wilkie and William Henry Bartlett.

They are all from the personal collection of Jordanian

Hisham Khatib, honorary vice chairman of the World Energy Council and former energy minister, who began purchasing art, books and atlases on the Holy Land while studying abroad.

"Unfortunately, the exhibition's visitors were mostly from the foreign community rather than Jordanians," Khatib told the Jordan Times in an interview this week. "Our people don't appreciate our heritage."

The catalogue of the exhibition, scheduled to continue until Dec. 12, is a glossy scholarly reference book which gives the concept of the exhibition and the history of the artists and their travels.

Khatib said he started collecting art by impressionists before he began developing an "obsession" for 19th century

paintings depicting the Holy Land, particularly Jerusalem.

"I even sold early original lithographs from famous artists such as Marc Chagall in order to buy Holy Land paintings," he said.

"I am interested in topographical, realistic and illustrative paintings rather than ornamental, decorative and romantic ones," Khatib said.

"For me it is interesting to see how familiar places and their inhabitants used to look like before," he added.

Khatib said he hoped to use the current display to help show people "our national heritage and to enhance their belonging to their region."

"One can associate himself with history when recognising a familiar place in the paintings and seeing how it looked like in the past."

UNRWA denies reports of changes to school curriculum Donor threatens halt to aid over 'anti-Jewish' material

By Alia Shukri Hamzeh

AMMAN — The United Nations Relief and Works Agency Friday denied news reports that it has given instructions for the removal of Palestinian national paraphernalia from its schools and the deletion of references from the Holy Koran in the agency's teaching materials.

In a statement issued by the agency's headquarters in Gaza, UNRWA said no such instructions have been given nor will any be.

According to an UNRWA source in Jordan, a U.S. donor to the agency has threatened to halt all financial aid if UNRWA continues to include what it called "anti-Jewish material in its school curriculum."

The source, who preferred anonymity, told the Jordan Times that the agency has been under scrutiny by the donor, a centre that monitors peace in the Middle East, over alleged anti-Jewish references that call for holy war (jihad) against Jews.

The source said criticism over the UNRWA school curriculum in Jordan, also taught in the West Bank, was directed at the inclusion of Koranic verses, Prophet Mohammad's sayings and Palestinian poetry that call

for holy war.

He added that the U.S. centre demanded a comprehensive investigation at the Jordanian branch of the agency this year and that it went further to demand investigations next year in Syria, Egypt and Lebanon, all host countries to Palestinian refugees.

"It imposed a condition on UNRWA demanding changes in school curricula in accordance with peace agreements with Israel," he said, adding that the agency would not respond to such demands.

The source added that agency work entails teaching Palestinian refugees their history, religion and beliefs.

"Our present curriculum has a Palestinian approach, and we won't change that because we do not want our students to forget their ties to their homeland," he added.

The UNRWA statement quoted Commissioner General Peter Hansen as saying that one of the agency's major achievements was contributing to "keeping Palestinian cultural identity alive." He added, however, that the agency does not permit inciteful material in its classrooms and has prepared curriculum enrichment materials for its schools to encourage peace education, democ-

racy, tolerance and conflict resolution.

According to other informed sources, two pro-Israeli U.S. senators, a Republican and a Democrat, have been steering the campaign against UNRWA and demanding that it apply the stipulations of the peace accords "only."

The cultural agreement between Jordan and Israel signed after the 1994 peace treaty calls for both countries to amend and refrain from any hostile or discriminatory expressions through propaganda or education.

The sources said the U.S.-based centre had "demanded that no reference to Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine or mention of the importance of Al Aqsa Mosque to Muslims and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre to Christians be used."

The sources told the Jordan Times that since the donor is one of UNRWA's many and its funding is negligible, the agency would continue teaching its students the same curriculum regardless of the consequences.

"UNRWA is the only U.N. agency without an annual budget. We depend on donations from countries, organisations and individuals," one source said, adding that it

negatively affects the agency's administration decisions on several policies by adhering to donors' demands.

The cash-strapped UNRWA, burdened with a real deficit of \$62 million in its \$314 million 1998 budget, operates 649 schools with 447,000 students in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Its schools use the same textbooks and curricula of the host governments and the Palestinian National Authority.

It has long tried to enlarge its donor base and increase contributions from Arab countries to help prevent any further budget deficits.

UNRWA was set up after the 1948 war that led to Israel's creation, offering basic health, relief and educational services to over 3.5 million Palestinian refugees.

With 1.4 million UN-registered refugees, 40 per cent of the total number, Jordan remains the largest host country.

UNRWA operates 13 refugee camps in Jordan which house and offer education to refugee children in more than 200 schools at the elementary and preparatory levels.



Passengers board the Royal Wings plane which made the first Jordanian commercial flight to Gaza International Airport (Petra photo)

Royal Wings makes first Jordanian commercial flight to Gaza airport

AMMAN (J.T.) — A Jordanian plane Friday made the first commercial flight from Amman to the recently opened Gaza International Airport, commencing regular flights between Palestine and Jordan.

The plane, owned and

operated by Royal Wings, a subsidiary of Royal Jordanian, carried Jasser Ziyad, director of the Civil Aviation Authority, and Ahd Quntar, Royal Wings director general, as well as other officials and passengers.

Royal Wings has announced plans to operate

two flights per week between Amman and Gaza. Palestine Airlines will also conduct two weekly flights between Amman and Gaza.

Royal Wings said it would study the possibility of increasing the number of flights in the future based on demand by travellers.

On Nov. 24, RJ made its maiden flight from Amman to Gaza carrying HRH Prince Faisal, who represented Jordan at the official inauguration ceremony, an official delegation and more than 50 Jordanian businesspersons and journalists.

'Stunning' exhibition on Petra opens in Washington

By George S. Hishmeh

WASHINGTON — A "wonderful idea" is how HRH Princess Sarvath responded recently to a question raised by the Jordan Times about whether the "stunning" exhibition featuring artefacts from Petra will go on tour elsewhere in the United States and Canada.

Princess Sarvath officially opened the exhibit, entitled "Petra: Jordan's City in the Rock," on Dec. 9 at Explorers Hall Museum of the National Geographic Society headquarters in downtown Washington, a few blocks from the White House. The exhibit blocks from the publication of an 18-page cover essay in this month's issue of National Geographic on the ancient city, once the capital of the Nabataeans.

Winged statues in bronze, terra cotta figures, ceramic jugs, storage jars, oil lamps, Nabataean coins and 1,400-year-old scrolls were among the many artefacts on display in the Explorers Hall for the first time in the United States.

Arabic coffee was served by two Jordanians in bedouin clothes inside an actual tent while two women in traditional dress baked

"shrak" bread for the VIP visitors, who included John Fahey, president of National Geographic Society, as well as various staffers from National Geographic who were involved in the cover story.

Other sponsors of the exhibit included the American Center for Oriental Research, the Petra National Trust and the Jordan Badia Research and Development Programme, a government project to improve quality of life through sustainable development.

In addition to the artefacts there was a display of how the ancient Nabataeans, rulers of the lands east of the Jordan River 2,000 years ago, constructed a sophisticated water network to supply their desert outpost; a reproduction of a mosaic floor of a Byzantine church, and enlarged photographs of some of Petra's monumental facades.

The exhibit, originally slated to be held here only, will run through Feb. 7.

In her remarks, Princess Sarvath said she was "overwhelmed by the magnificence" of this month's cover article, "Petra: Ancient City of Stone," as well as "this stunning exhibition." She added that she did not realise that the exhibit would be "so breathtaking."

"This exhibition provides an opportunity to

recognise the achievements of this gifted people, and to shed some light on their extremely sophisticated culture which is so exquisitely demonstrated before us," the Princess said.

Early works, the Princess added, did not make "a significant contribution" to understanding the history of Petra, which was rediscovered in 1812, or the history of the Nabataeans. The attention of the scholars was restricted to funerary architecture and art.

"Since the fifties of this century," she said, "several archaeological excavations have been carried out which helped redress the balance, and the Nabataeans began to emerge as builders for the living as well as the dead." Yet, she pointed out, the research overlooked the centuries of both growth and decline and only focused on the rather short period of peak prosperity between the first century B.C. and the first century A.D.

"It is only recently with the discovery of two churches and a cache of papyri scrolls that we began to learn for sure something about the history of Petra in the Byzantine period, when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman eastern empire."

Underlining that the carved facades of the rose red city may still hold many secrets, she

stressed that the Nabataean accomplishments include "the contrasts of fired pottery of egg-shell thinness and monumental facades with imposing carvings hewn out of solid rock."

However, the Princess said their "most impressive achievement is to be seen in the area of water and soil conservation."

But very little has changed over 3,000 years, she noted. "Now, as then, political stability is the key to any kind of human development, be it in trade, agriculture or education, and now, as then, we need to make decisions with our hearts as well as our heads. In identifying and understanding our past, we will know better how to consolidate our present, and build our future in terms of human needs, physically, emotionally and materially. None of us can ever know where we are going until we know where we are coming from."

Minister of Tourism Akei Bilalji was upbeat in his brief remarks about tourism prospects in Jordan. He said there was a slight increase in the number of visitors to Jordan, mainly from the Arab Gulf region. Visitors in 1998 totalled 1.4 million compared to 1.2 million in the preceding year, "and we will be closing with \$850 million in returns" for this year

compared to \$790 million," thereby making tourism the second largest export industry.

He expressed hope that the industry would be "the number one [earner] by the year 2000."

Bilalji thanked the Society for assisting Jordan "in coming out here and taking Petra to the whole world."

"If we were to do it ourselves, we could not afford it, so we are grateful for the Society having helped us on this particular issue."

In his welcoming remarks, Fahey expressed his gratitude for Jordan's "generous support" in making the exhibit possible. "This is a wonderful way to share Jordan's national treasures with people everywhere — and fully in keeping with Her Royal Highness' promotion of education as a means of greater international understanding."

Fahey noted that the National Geographic Society "has long been fascinated with Jordan and Petra in particular," pointing out that Petra was introduced to the magazine's readers in 1907, "and we described it as 'one of the strangest, most beautiful and most enchanting spots upon this earth'."

"Nothing has changed since," he added.

Tight security for Pinochet hearing

LONDON (AFP) — A tight security operation was in full swing Friday as a London court which normally deals with terrorist crimes prepared for the arrival of former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet.

He was due at Belmarsh magistrates' court in south-east London at 2:08 p.m. (1400 GMT) for his first appearance in public since his arrest more than two months ago.

It follows the decision by Home Secretary Jack Straw Wednesday to allow Spain's request for his extradition to go ahead. The warrant alleges genocide, terrorism and torture during his 1973-1990 dictatorship.

Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Graham Parkinson was also to hear any application to vary Pinochet's bail conditions.

A date could also be set for a committal, or main extradition hearing, the first substantive stage in a process likely to stretch several months.

Pinochet, 83, was to be brought to Belmarsh under heavy police escort and expected to enter the court via a side entrance.

The hearing had been due to take place at Bow Street magistrates' court in central London, but was moved for security reasons.

The top-security Belmarsh court has seen some of Britain's most notorious IRA terrorists and is connected to the neighbouring top-security prison by a tunnel.

By 8:30 a.m. more than 50 police officers were on duty near the building, checking every car arriving at the entrance and keeping the growing crowd of reporters and photographers behind metal barricades.

Drivers were searched before they could leave their cars inside the court precincts.

Officers led all journalists to a van where their bags and equipment were put through an X-ray machine. Police with dogs combed hushes and trees around the perimeter for suspect packages.

The number of journalists allowed into the court was restricted, with only 38 places available for a hearing that has attracted world

attention.

In the small, glass-panelled public gallery there is room for only a small number of Pinochet protesters and supporters, who were being allocated spaces equally. There was no room for other members of the public.

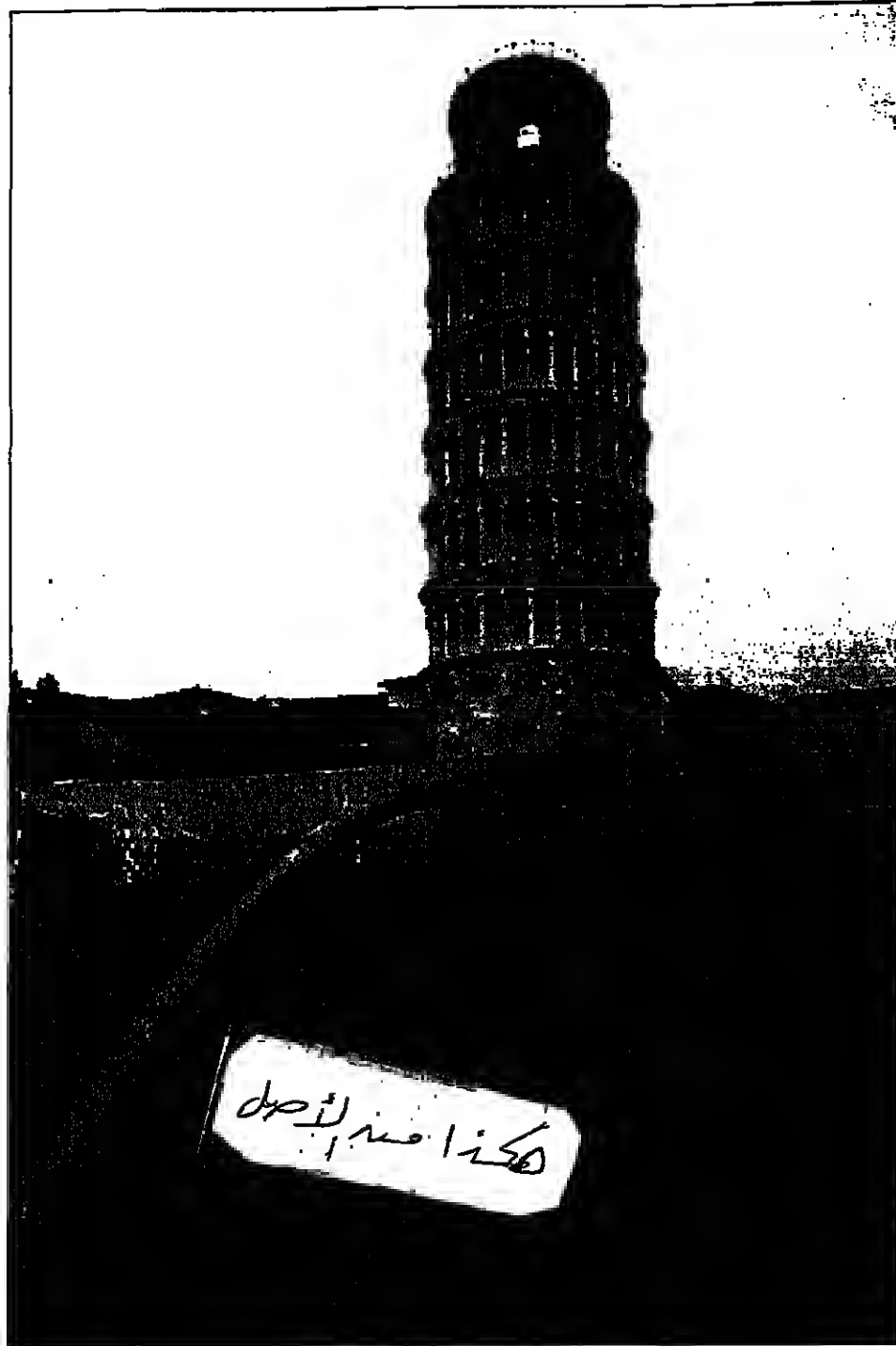
A small group of Pinochet supporters gathered outside at dawn. They draped banners over police crash barriers proclaiming "Viva Pinochet."

The first two anti-Pinochet protesters to arrive unfurled a banner showing painted silhouettes of people who had disappeared in Chile, asking: "Pinochet where are they?"

The two factions stood on opposite sides of the road with police officers between them.

Security was also tight around Pinochet's temporary home on an exclusive estate west of London, with about 30 police officers patrolling the area.

Police with metal detectors searched undergrowth within several hundred yards of his rented mansion while colleagues with sniffer dogs patrolled.



The two giant steel 'braces' are pictured in front of the Leaning Tower of Pisa. An expert commission has decided to give the green light to the latest scheme to straighten the Renaissance bell tower before undertaking excavation work designed to stabilise the tower and coax it fractionally back towards the vertical. Two 103 metre plastic-coated cables will be attached as a safety measure to keep the gracious white tower upright should excavation go horribly wrong (Reuters photo)

Rain delays work on plan to attach suspenders on Pisa tower

PISA, Italy (AP) — Heavy rain Friday delayed the start of the first steps in a plan to attach steel "suspenders" to the Leaning Tower, the latest strategy aimed at ensuring the monument doesn't topple over.

The engineer overseeing the work, Paolo Heiniger, said the two sets of 50-millimetre thick cables had been moved to the base of the 12th-century tower but could not be raised until the weather improved.

The project has run into a series of obstacles, delaying its start for months. Heiniger said he hoped the cables would be in place

by the end of the month.

The 103-metre long cables will be attached to anchors placed behind the tower and connected to the monument at a height of 26 metres.

Heiniger said the cables would serve as a "precaution," against any possible movement of the tower when work begins in 1999 to straighten it.

That plan calls for removal of some soil from underneath one side of the tower to allow it to settle better and lean one-half degree less. It now leans six degrees or four metres off the perpendicular.

appears to endanger stability, the "suspenders" would be pulled tight to hold up the tower.

Heiniger said the chances of this happening were minimal.

If all goes well, the braces will be removed.

The 55-metre high tower was closed to tourists in 1990 for fear it might topple over.

After the closure, several steel bands were placed around the tower to act as a kind of support girdle.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Mongolian president meets Chinese counterpart in Beijing

BEIJING (AFP) — Mongolian President Natsagiin Bagabandi, on the first ever state visit to China, Friday met Chinese President Jiang Zemin, Xinhua reported. The two presidents were due to sign documents on relations into the 21st century, on cultural and scientific cooperation and on Chinese aid to Mongolia. Bagabandi, who is accompanied by a 30-member business delegation on the six-day visit, is also pushing trade ties with China and will visit the southern boom city of Shenzhen and the Inner Mongolian capital of Hohhot. Ever since the Mongol armies of Genghis Khan stormed over China's Great Wall in the 13th century and established the Yuan dynasty in Beijing, rivalry and fear has dominated relations. But on the eve of the millennium, Mongolia's new democratic leaders are keen to cement stable, cordial relations with Beijing. "The president has said time and again that we have no border or political disputes with China," said Bagabandi's spokesman. "If we look back all the time, it is quite difficult to look forward." Mongolia's acting Foreign Minister, R. Amarjargal, who accompanied Bagabandi on the trip, emphasised the importance of building ties between landlocked Mongolia, with its 2.4 million people and giant China. "Chinese businesses are leading the growth of new business in Mongolia," he said.

Prosecutor investigating whether city paid for mayor's gala

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal prosecutors have begun a criminal investigation into whether tens of thousands of dollars in public funds were used for a celebration for departing Mayor Marion Barry. The mayor and other officials have said repeatedly that no taxpayer money was used to fund the Oct. 22 gala honouring Barry's tenure as the city's leader. Thursday, the mayor's wife Cora Masters Barry, who supervised the planning of the gala, issued a statement saying that "at the appropriate time, an announcement about the details of the event will be made." Witnesses have told investigators about attempts to divert funds, forge contracts and shred documents in order to conceal the spending of municipal funds on the event. The Washington Post reported in its editions Friday, Monda Webb, a contractor who worked on the event, provided the newspaper with copies of check stubs showing that she received \$3,200 in city funds for her work on the programme.

Geneva court extends detention of former Ukrainian premier

GENEVA (AFP) — A Geneva court Friday extended by one month the detention of former Ukrainian Prime Minister Pavlo Lazarenko, arrested last week in Switzerland on money laundering charges, his lawyer said. The court took the step due to the risk of escape and collusion and because of an ongoing investigation, Paul Gully-Hart said. An immediate request for bail was denied but the lawyer said he would make another demand next week. The 45-year-old Ukrainian opposition leader was picked up by police in the western Swiss city of Basel nine days ago holding a Panamanian passport and was formally arrested in Geneva last Friday. Geneva public prosecutor Bernard Bertossa had been pressing for the maximum detention period, which is three months, renewable. The most important thing is that he is able to resume his political responsibilities, Gully-Hart said earlier. Lazarenko was premier from May 1996 to July 1997, when he was ousted by current President Leonid Koushna who accused him of corruption and misuse. Leader of the centrist Hromada party, he is a candidate for the upcoming presidential elections in October. In Kiev, supporters have mounted protests against what they insist is a "political plot" by the ruling powers in the run-up to the election. The Geneva judge Laurent Kasper-Ansermet, who said that relatively large sums have been blocked in Switzerland in the affair, arrived in Ukraine Monday to investigate the money laundering charges.

Alleged Australian mail bomber sent to jail for mental assessment

CANBERRA, Australia (AP) — The man accused of waging a nationwide letter-bombing campaign was sent to a psychiatric hospital for prisoners Friday amid concern he may try to commit suicide. Colin Dunstan, 43, is facing 28 counts of endangering life through the use of an explosive device. He was arrested at Canberra Hospital a week ago after being admitted with a slashed wrist, climaxing three days of national panic over letter bombs. One letter bomb exploded at the Canberra mail centre Dec. 2, slightly injuring two postal workers. That led to a nationwide alert in which 27 similar devices were discovered. Dunstan appeared in the Canberra Magistrates Court Friday for a decision on where to carry out a mental health assessment of him. Chief Magistrate Ron Cahill transferred Dunstan to Sydney's Long Bay psychiatric hospital and jail, where trained staff would be able to keep him under observation around-the-clock. Cahill said he was concerned about Dunstan's welfare after initial psychiatric assessments found that he was at risk of harming himself. "If we're wrong it could have fatal results," Cahill said. Dunstan, who has made no plea or bail application, was ordered to reappear in Canberra's Magistrates Court on Dec. 23 following psychiatric assessment. Dunstan had been on leave from the Australian Tax Office after having an affair with a female co-worker in 1990 and 1991, according to court documents. He blamed this episode for the breakup of his own marriage. He apparently also blamed the tax office and various human rights and equal opportunity officials for his troubles. Police said all of the 28 letter bombs were all addressed to such authorities.

Anti-drug message on pencil turns pro-drug during sharpening

TICONDEROGA, New York (AP) — A company is trying to erase an embarrassing mistake it made on pencils bearing an anti-drug message. The pencils carry the slogan: "Too Cool To Do Drugs." But a sharp-eyed fourth-grader in northern New York noticed when the pencils are sharpened, the message turns into "Cool To Do Drugs" then simply "Do Drugs." As a result of the discovery by 10-year-old Kodi Mosier of Ticonderoga Elementary School, the company, called The Bureau For At-Risk Youth of Plainville, recalled the pencils. "We're actually a little embarrassed that we didn't notice that sooner," spokeswoman Darlene Clair told Friday's Press-Republican of Plattsburgh. A new batch of pencils will have the message written in the opposite direction, so when they are sharpened, they read "Too Cool To Do" and finally "Too Cool." For pointing out the botched message, Kodi earned his class a letter of apology from the company and a box full of T-shirts. Why does Kodi think the company didn't catch the mistake themselves? "I guess they didn't sharpen their pencils," he said.

Dozens of U.S. airmen under investigation in alleged test scam

TOKYO (AP) — Some 40 U.S. airmen assigned to Yokota Air Base in Japan are under investigation on charges of cheating on promotion tests, an Air Force spokesman said Friday.

Six airmen have been charged and two have pleaded guilty at their courts-martial, said spokesman Maj. Stephen Cutter. Air Force regulations forbid any discussion or note-sharing on the promotion tests, called the Weighted Airman Promotion, which make up a major part of the criteria used to promote airmen. The cheating charges are extremely serious in the Air Force, Cutter said.

Tech. Sgt. James Mills

pleaded innocent at his court-martial, which began Friday, Cutter said.

Wednesday, Staff Sgt. Douglas Ivey pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 15 days in jail and 15 days of hard labour.

"I have learned it only takes one bad decision to make or break an honourable career," Ivey was quoted as telling the court by the Pacific Stars and Stripes newspaper in its Friday's editions.

According to court testimony, Ivey agreed to be helped on preparing for the test and picked up notes another airman left in his car, the Stars and Stripes said.

Last month, Tech. Sgt.

Kevin Mitchell pleaded guilty to charges of sharing answers in a 1997 test and was sentenced to a month in jail and 45 days of hard labour and was demoted one rank.

Three other airmen are slated for courts-martial.

Prosecutor Capt. Won Lee was quoted by the Stars and Stripes as saying that the tests were so competitive that even a couple of points could mean as much as another candidate winning an achievement medal in a remote difficult place.

Lee urged stiff penalties to send "a message that winners never cheat and cheaters never win," the newspaper said.

Animal rights hunger striker back in prison

LONDON (AFP) — A jailed animal rights activist was back in prison on the 65th day of his hunger strike Friday after refusing food and treatment by hospital staff.

Prison officials said doctors had concluded there was "no clinical need" for Barry Horne, who is serving an 18-year jail term for a wave of firebomb attacks, to remain in hospital.

He launched his hunger strike in early October to protest the government's refusal to set up a Royal Commission on animal experiments. His condition was described as "serious but stable."

Horne, 46, was transferred late Thursday from York hospital in northern England, where he had been moved on Nov. 24, to York prison.

Hospital staff said he had refused permission to be fed or treated, could be equally well cared for at the prison medical centre, and that day-to-day running of the hospital was being seriously disrupted.

Police forces are said to be on alert amid fears his death could spark a wave of attacks by animal rights activists.

Horne had been refusing food since Oct. 6 but was taking fluids. He will continue to be monitored by the hospital.

A statement from the York health services trust which runs the hospital said Horne had no "irreversible conditions" because of his fast.

"At the express wish of Mr. Horne, the hospital was unable to feed or treat him, and it was concluded he could be looked after equally well in the prison medical centre," it added.

The trust's chief executive, Peter Kennedy, said it had an obligation to provide a safe and peaceful environment for its other patients as well, but last weekend it was forced to declare "a major security alert."

"This is not acceptable. The risk of some serious incident happening was too high."

The British government has insisted it will not bow to "blackmail," saying it was "out of the question" to set up a Royal Commission under

Babe bombed, but tots loving toys

LOS ANGELES (AP) — When that cute little pig got roasted at the box office, there were immediate concerns that toy stores would feel the heat.

So far, plush toys based on the porker from "Babe: Pig in the City" are selling nicely in what is shaping up to be a better overall holiday season for movie toys than 1997.

But kids are really going wild for toys from "that other" holiday movie.

"It's going to be A Bug's Life Christmas. It's not going to be a Babe Christmas," said Jeffrey Thomson, an analyst for Hilliard Lyons.

Movie merchandising, like movie making, is a high-stakes business that doesn't always follow conventional wisdom and relies heavily on the whims of young — and often fickle — consumers.

"A Bug's Life," Disney's animated ant adventure, opened to huge business, at the

November, energising sales of everything from "Bug's Life" books to talking grasshopper statuettes.

At the other end of the spectrum is "Babe: Pig in the City," the expensive sequel to 1995's Oscar-nominated hit, "Babe." It opened the same weekend as the Disney film and flopped.

Though it received generally favourable reviews, some critics found the movie too scary for children. The company with the merchandise license for "Babe" saw its stock tumble 12 per cent the Monday after the opening.

Still, one of the most popular items in recent weeks has been Real Live Babe, a talking stuffed animal.

"The sell-through for 'Babe' has been OK, considering the movie bombed," said Brett Hendrickson, an analyst for B. Riley and Co.

"Are the stores going to be stuck with Babe inventory at the end of year? We don't know. I

don't think the managers know yet."

For much of this year, analysts said, movie merchandise was in a rut, contributing to what many described as a generally flat market for toys going into the critical holiday season.

"Godzilla" toy sales weren't necessarily bad, but fell short of the lofty expectations, as did the movie. "Small Soldiers" merchandise did reasonably well, but not great. And "Mulan" items were mostly a bust.

Still, two weeks into the holiday shopping season, retailers are expecting a stronger movie toy sales this year, powered by the success of "A Bug's Life" and the surprising resiliency of other toys.

"Rugrats" toys, which have been on the market for years because of a television show, are benefiting from the success of the recent "The Rugrats Movie," said Laura Mahle, a spokeswoman

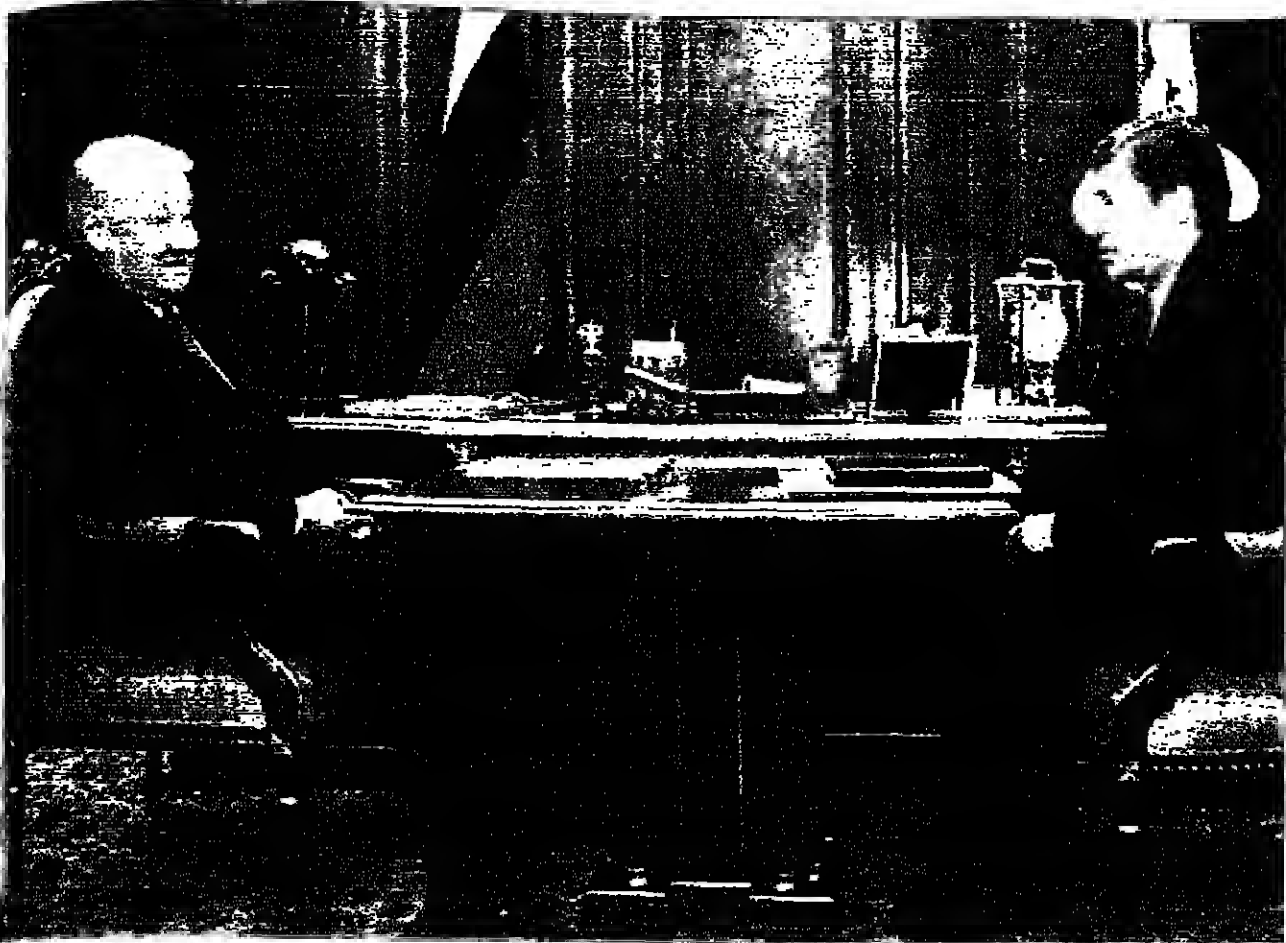
for the Kmart department store chain.

And "Star Wars" merchandise continues to be appealing, decades after the original movie. A new instalment is scheduled to hit movie theatres next year.

Equity Marketing Inc. of Beverly Hills holds the licence to "Babe" goods, including the Real Live Babe. Equity says it's too early to tell how the movie will shape toy sales, but the company has soured on movie tie-in merchandise.

Equity also had license for "Godzilla" plush toys, which flopped. That doesn't mean movies have been bad for Equity. On the contrary, it has struck a successful partnership with Burger King, providing "Rugrats" promotional items that are available only with food purchases.

Sheree Aronson, Equity's director of investor and public relations, said the company was "moving solidly back" to fast-food partnerships.



Russian President Boris Yeltsin (left) and head of presidential administration Nikolay Bordyuzha speak during their meeting. Yeltsin, keen to prove he is not about to give up power, went to the Kremlin for talks with his top aide Friday after recovering from pneumonia (Reuters photo)

Yeltsin back to work in the Kremlin

MOSCOW (AFP) — Russian President Boris Yeltsin arrived at the Kremlin for work Friday, two days after leaving hospital where he was recovering from pneumonia, Russian news agencies reported.

Chief Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Yakushev said the president could even hold working meetings, but did not elaborate. Interfax reported.

Yeltsin was admitted to the Central Clinical Hospital with a high temperature and the lung infection on Nov. 22, prompting concern about his health and his fitness to govern.

The president quit his hospital quarters briefly on Monday to fire his long-serving chief of staff in Getekovskiy, giving him a rambling lecture on television before returning to the clinic on Tuesday orders.

Wednesday, the Kremlin said he was discharged from

hospital after his medical team said Yeltsin had completed his treatment and needed to continue his convalescence in the country.

"Doctors are generally satisfied with the president's condition," Yakushev said then.

Yeltsin returned to the Kremlin Friday from his Russian country residence, sited some 95 kilometres north-west of the Russian capital.

The Russian leader has had a difficult few months, his authority battered by the political fallout from an acute economic crisis which erupted in mid-August and which saw the Kremlin cede power to the government.

Repeated bouts of ill-health have further undermined Yeltsin and contributed to the sense of drift at the top.

That has left Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov as de facto president, and fuelled speculation that the premier — who would become acting

head of state should Yeltsin die in office or be ruled unfit to rule — could win the Kremlin in presidential elections scheduled for 2000.

However, Primakov has repeatedly insisted he is not interested in the job, and told the daily Nezavisimaya Gazeta Wednesday that Yeltsin was fit enough to serve out of the rest of his term.

"The functions that he fulfils he is able to carry out perfectly, there is no doubt about that," he said.

Speculation about the president's health has become part of the daily grind of Kremlin-watching since Yeltsin won reelection in July 1996.

The president suffered a string of heart attacks during a hectic electoral campaign, aides now admit, forcing him to undergo a marathon quintuple heart bypass operation in November 1996.

Since then Yeltsin has been vulnerable to chest

infections and checked in and out of clinics as doctors have sought to nurse him back to health.

But the recurrent bouts of illness have taken their toll, and seen aides cut back on Yeltsin's increasingly gaffe-strewn foreign trips.

Bronchitis forced Yeltsin to cut short a Central Asian tour in October during which he appeared at times incoherent and close to collapse.

The health crisis forced him to spend three weeks off work to recover from what officials said was "nervous exhaustion," and led to the cancellation of a trip to the APEC forum in Kuala Lumpur, a meeting with European leaders in Vienna, and a state visit to India.

Officials have also been increasingly shielding Yeltsin from the media during trips to Moscow by visiting dignitaries, following a confused performance at a joint press conference with U.S. President Bill Clinton.

Le Pen refuses to abandon ship as French far-right split widens

PARIS (AFP) — A split in France's far-right National Front widened further Friday with leader Jean-Marie Le Pen ordering disciplinary action against "mutineer" challengers and pledging never to abandon ship.

In a statement broadcast live on French television, the 70-year-old leader-founder of France's third biggest party announced his would-be successor Bruno Megret was being suspended pending disciplinary action, along with four other leading party rebels.

"I will not abandon the ship's helm to a handful of perfidious lieutenants and quartermasters," he said, calling on the tens of thousands of members of the anti-immigrant party to rally to his side.

The 49-year-old Megret, who represents a different generation and style of extremist politician, this week publicly backed a call for a special party conference next month that could see Le Pen unseated by majority vote.

With signatures for a special conference needed,

from 20 per cent of party members — whose exact number remains a mystery — Megret supporters have been busily collecting petitions on what Le Pen said were "fake party letter-heads".

"Trust me!", said the charismatic Front leader, delivering an emotional speech that could determine his political survival. "The conference is a trap. Do not sign. If you have, withdraw your signatures ... I have proof the plot has been hatching for some time."

"I'm not an extreme-rightist, I'm extremely straight," said Le Pen, wielding his legendary political repartee.

He said the five suspended Front leaders, including the companion of one of his three daughters, who has also joined the Megret camp, would face disciplinary action for "disobedience".

But signalling the rebels' determination to fight on, meaning the Front stands poised to fly apart, Megret minutes later dubbed the suspensions "null and void".

"With these secessionist

decisions, Jean-Marie Le Pen is assuming the responsibility for a split he will have to account for to our members," a statement from Megret said.

Meanwhile, reports flowed in of political thugery as the fight for power blossomed in Front offices across France.

Megret supporters claimed computer files and petitions had been nabbed by a pro-Le Pen security squad in southern France while the leader's supporters said the rebels had seized papers and computer archives. Funds managed by Le Pen have allegedly been blocked.

Le Pen, who has kept a tight rein on leadership of the party since its foundation 26 years ago, reiterated he opposed holding a party conference on the grounds it would only play up rivalry, thus jeopardising the Front's chances in next year's European elections.

The chauvinistic, Eurosceptic party first bounced out of oblivion in the 1984 European poll and Le Pen believes his party could have boosted its usual 15 per cent score to well over

20 per cent in the June 1999 vote. Less than 51 per cent of French voters backed the Maastricht Treaty in 1992.

"This criminal and subversive operation comes just as the majority of France prepares to join the National Front in its campaign to change Europe to allow the survival of France," he said. "France is under threat."

He accused the forces behind the mutiny threatening his party of being "powerful capitalists close to the Elysee," the office of conservative President Jacques Chirac.

A split in the pariah party seen as the nation's shame by most democrats would cause dramatic change in France's political map. Commentators this week gave free vent to hopes the Front was finally on the road to imminent demise.

"Our country is beginning to return to normality," said the conservative daily Le Figaro. "We were one of the rare nations to have given birth to a big extreme rightwing party."

"It is over. The abscess is bursting. We have entered the post-Le Pen era."

Chechen general prosecutor disappears

MOSCOW (AP) — Only days after the killings of four foreigners, Chechenya's general prosecutor has disappeared and may have been kidnapped, a news report said Friday.

Mansur Tagirov vanished Thursday evening as he returned to Chechenya's capital city of Grozny from a small village nearby, according to Russian news reports.

Officials at the prosecutor's office said Tagirov was seized by unidentified assailants, possibly by an armed band seeking the release of one of their colleagues from prison.

Tagirov was investigating the deaths of four foreigners whose severed heads were found Tuesday lined up by a roadside in the breakaway Russian republic.

The victims — Peir Kennedy, Darren Hickey and Rudolf Petschi of Britain and Stanley Shaw of New Zealand — had been abducted Oct. 3 by unidentified gunmen in Grozny.

Meanwhile, Chechen Deputy Prime Minister Turpal Atgeriyev said authorities had arrested a man and claimed he had confessed to kidnapping the four foreigners. The suspect was identified as Apti Abitayev, the ITAR-TASS news agency said.

Chechen security forces were still searching Friday for additional suspects as well as the bodies of the four foreigners who were killed.

Atgeriyev also dismissed a videotape that showed one of the four victims saying he was spying for Britain.

"There are certain methods that might force a person to confess to any crime," Atgeriyev said. The videotape, shown Thursday by Chechenya's vice president, showed hostage Peter Kennedy claiming that the four men had been in Chechenya to listen in on phone conversations in the breakaway republic.

Chechen officials refused to answer any questions about the tape, including where or when it was filmed and how or why the government had it.

Since Chechenya's two year independence war with Russia which ended in 1996, the Caucasus region has been awash in violence as feuding gangs wage bloody turf wars. It has also seen a sharp rise in kidnappings, mostly for ransom.

Italy in tainted Christmas cake scare

ROME (AFP) — Thousands of Christmas cakes made by food giant Nestlé have been withdrawn from shelves in Italian stores after an extremist animal rights group said it had laced two panettone cakes with rat poison, police said Friday.

The self-styled Animal Liberation Front said in messages to the ANSA news agency in Florence and Bologna that the two cakes had been made by Nestlé subsidiaries Motta and Alemagna.

"Panettoni made by Nestlé have been poisoned with high doses of Raccumin (rat poison)," the Front communiqués said.

"Multinational Nestlé must stop mass poisoning by genetically engineered products," it added.

Italy's top retailer Coop said it had considered it safe to withdraw all Motta and Alemagna panettone cakes from its 1,000 stores.

"This is a cautionary step pending the outcome of a judicial investigation," said Coop marketing manager Mario Cifello.

Public prosecutors in Bologna and Florence ordered an investigation whose results were expected late Friday or Saturday.

Nestlé spokesman Massimo Rossi recalled that his company had been targeted in similar attacks in Florence before.

Last summer Nestlé trucks carrying ice cream had been set on

fire by unidentified assailants.

In the German state of Hesse, around Frankfurt, no trace of poison was found last month after Nestlé products were removed from shelves in supermarkets following an extortion attempt.

Searches were started after a protest group, calling itself "Robin Food of Sherwood Forest," said it had poisoned five products produced by Nestlé — including After Eight and Kit-Kat brands of chocolate — or its subsidiaries Alce, Maggi and Thomy, on sale in supermarkets of the Edeka chain.

In a letter to AFP's Bonn office, the group claimed the action was to protest Nestlé's use of genetically-engi-

neered food products.

However, Nestlé spokeswoman Barbara Nickerson said the self-proclaimed poisoners were attempting to extort money from the company.

She said previous blackmailers had demanded sums of up to nine million marks (\$5.3 million).

Frankfurt police said the same "Robin Food" group had threatened Nestlé earlier, claiming to have used pesticides to poison products in Bavaria and Baden-Wuerttemberg. No trace of poison was found.

In Germany, Nestlé offered a one million mark (\$990,000) reward for information leading to the arrest of the blackmailers.

Three Indonesian reformists to be charged with subversion

JAKARTA (AFP) — Indonesian prosecutors are preparing to try three reform leaders on charges of conspiring to topple the government, police said Friday.

The dossiers of the three people were forwarded to the prosecutor's office on Nov. 8," said Saleh of the National Police's information office.

The dossiers were based on charges of malevolent conspiracy for subversion," Saleh told AFP.

Saleh gave the initials of Hidayat, Hariadi Darmawan and Sri Edi Swasono when asked whose dossiers were sent.

Under the Indonesian legal system the police, after questioning suspects, forward their dossiers along with any charges to be levelled to the prosecutor's office which finalises and prepares the accusations for trial.

The charge carries up to 15 years in jail.

The three were among 18 signatories, including several retired generals, of a joint statement issued on Nov. 12 that rejected the presidency of B.J. Habibie and demanded the setting up of a transitional authority.

The declaration was issued on the eve of bloody

clashes between students and the security forces close to parliament in Jakarta which left at least 15 people dead and around 400 injured.

Police began questioning the 18 signatories on charges of subversion on Nov. 14, the day after the bloodshed.

Hidayat is a member of the National Front which groups mostly retired generals.

Darmawan is one of the three presidium member of the Association of Alumni of the University of Indonesia (ILUNI), which along with students from the state university was

active in calling for reform and pressuring former President Suharto to step down in May.

Swasono is also an ILUNI member.

The questioning of the 18 on charges of subversion has been widely criticised by lawyers and reformists as a sign the government is still following the iron-fisted ways of the old Suharto regime.

The other 15 signatories of the petition included former Jakarta governor Ali Sadikin, a retired marine general, and Kemal Idris, former commander of the army Strategic Reserve Command.

Philadelphia bans Christmas trees in some homes

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — Charles Adolfo breaks the law every Christmas.

Each year he puts up a freshly cut tree and decorates it, he joins thousands of others in the United States' fifth-largest city in breaking a fire code and risking a \$300 fine.

"I had no idea it was illegal to put up a Christmas tree in my own home," Adolfo said after buying a 2-metre tree.

"This is uncalled for." In many cities, live Christmas trees are forbidden only in public places, such as libraries, schools, hospitals and hotels.

In places like New York, San Francisco, Baltimore, Minneapolis and Detroit, people can put up whatever decorations they like.

But in Philadelphia, people who live in high-rises or apart-

ments in converted brownstone homes don't have the same liberty.

Those residents must either put up fire-resistant artificial trees or trees with the roots wrapped in burlap to keep them from drying out. The law has been on the books for 16 years, intended to prevent tree-related fires from sweeping through multifamily complexes.

Not that the law is enforced — Philadelphia fire officials don't have the staff to do that. But officials who do spot trees in the wrong sorts of homes ask residents to fix the problem.

"We want people to have a happy safe holiday, but we know this is hard to enforce," said executive fire chief Henry Dolberry. "If nothing else, at

least with the law on the books we can raise a few people's awareness of fire prevention."

Though no one has ever been fined — and no one in Philadelphia has died from a tree-related fire in the last 20 years — fire officials say there's enough reason to keep the ban.

"Nationally, about 10 deaths occur because of Christmas tree fires every year," Dolberry said. "And with it being so warm this year, trees are bound to dry out easily. It's like firewood all ready to go."

Christmas trees cause one home fire out of 1,000 across the country every year, according to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission.

The Philadelphia law affects about 157,000 residences in a

city of about 670,000 dwellings with three or more apartments, according to U.S. Census figures. The city code was last modified in 1997 to allow cut trees in single and twin homes, row houses and duplexes. It still bans cut trees in libraries, dormitories, nursing homes and other public buildings.

The Christmas Tree Association believes the law is unnecessary.

"We're not trying to pick a fight with anyone, but people should be able to enjoy their real Christmas trees," said Ellis Schmidt, chairman of the association's safety committee in Pennsylvania. "A well-maintained tree is not the hazard a lot of people think it is. We don't feel this law is based on fact."

A LEBANESE SUPER STAR IS NOW IN AMMAN

MARASEM
IS THE NEW, EXCITING,
LUXURIOUS LEBANESE RESTAURANT,
LOCATED ON THE AIRPORT ROAD
INSIDE MC MAGIC CITY.

OUR DELICIOUS LEBANESE FOOD IS
COOKED BY MASTER CHEF "HUSSAIN"
FROM LEBANON, SO YOU CAN BE SURE
OF THE STAR QUALITY
EVERY TIME

RESTAURANT

TAKE THE DIFFERENCE!

AIRPORT ROAD - BEFORE ARRIVAL HAMAM - MC MAGIC CITY - TEL: (DIRECT) 5712738 TEL: (MC MAGIC) 5712342 EXT. 244

Armed and dangerous

With beatings common, salaries unpaid and mental health checks ineffectual, the guardians of Russia's nuclear weapons are growing hungry, angry, suicidal — and even psychotic.

By James Meek

ONE DAY in mid-September Sergei Kuzminykh came home from the factory to his flat in St. Petersburg to find a note from his wife, Rimma. "Our Sasha's had a breakdown," it read. "He's barricaded himself in one of the compartments and they've called me to go and talk to him. I've flown to the base."

Something strange had certainly happened to the Kuzminykh's 19-year-old son Sasha, a quiet, intelligent boy coming to the end of his national service in the Russian navy — something which led to perhaps the most alarming episode so far in the saga of the former Soviet armed forces' collapse, one which raises disturbing questions about the nature of the men who watch over the nuclear installations of a pauper state.

Sasha Kuzminykh was a torpedo specialist on board the nuclear submarine Bars (Snow Leopard), which had just returned from a long deep-ocean patrol. It was moored at a wharf in the garrison settlement of Skalisty, at the mouth of the fjord leading from the Arctic city of Murmansk to the Barents Sea.

In the early hours of Friday, September 11, Kuzminykh emerged from the submarine and walked onto the quayside carrying a heavy metal chisel. He hurled himself at the sailor on sentry duty, murdered him, and seized his fully-loaded Kalashnikov. He shot at a commander from another submarine who came to investigate, seriously wounding him.

That night the Bars, which normally carries a crew of 70, had a skeleton watch. Clambering back inside the vessel, Kuzminykh entered the cabin where five of his crewmates lay asleep and shot them dead. He marched another two into the forward torpedo compartment, shot them, and sealed the bulkhead.

When negotiators began talking with him over the sub's intercom system, he made no concessions. He simply threatened to detonate the vessel's torpedoes. His mother, his brother, a Russian psychologist, a succession of British admirals and a local Orthodox priest were unable to persuade him to give himself up. After more than 24 hours, special forces came in were preparing to storm the torpedo room when they heard the sound of a single shot fired from the far side of the three-inch thick steel bulkhead. Kuzminykh had taken his own life. The Bars was not carrying its usual complement of nuclear-tipped cruise missiles. But an explosion could have breached the reactor's nuclear reactor. "For a day and a night, the country was on the brink of a nuclear catastrophe. It would have been a second Chernobyl."

The tragedy sent a fresh tremor through Norway, less than 100 miles west of Skalisty. The country has growing fear of the Russian navy's half-secret atomic arms dumps, nuclear weapons and radioactive junkyards on the Kola peninsula.

And Norway is not alone. Specialists speak increasingly of the high level of security and control over Russia's nuclear warheads, con-

centrated at three dozen sites across European Russia, south Siberia and the Pacific. Yet even if they are right, what of the human factor? As scores of officers commit suicide, mired in poverty and debt because of unpaid salaries, with monitoring of the mental health of servicemen primitive, and with a culture of savage beating, humiliation and degradation endemic among half-starved conscripts, there are reasons to fear that, while Russia's nuclear weapons are not going to blow up of their own accord, the men looking after them are.

Sasha Kuzminykh's room at his parents' flat, in Aeroplane Builders' Street, resembles the rooms of millions of other Russian schoolboys who have grown up and left home — a guitar hanging on the wall, a gold medal for first prize in a city ice hockey tournament, a book of poems by Sergei Yesenin. There seems little about his early life that was remarkable: His father was a lathe-turner, his mother a cleaner. He attended better than average schools and, having been selected to serve in one of Russia's most modern nuclear submarines, should have had a clean educational and medical record.

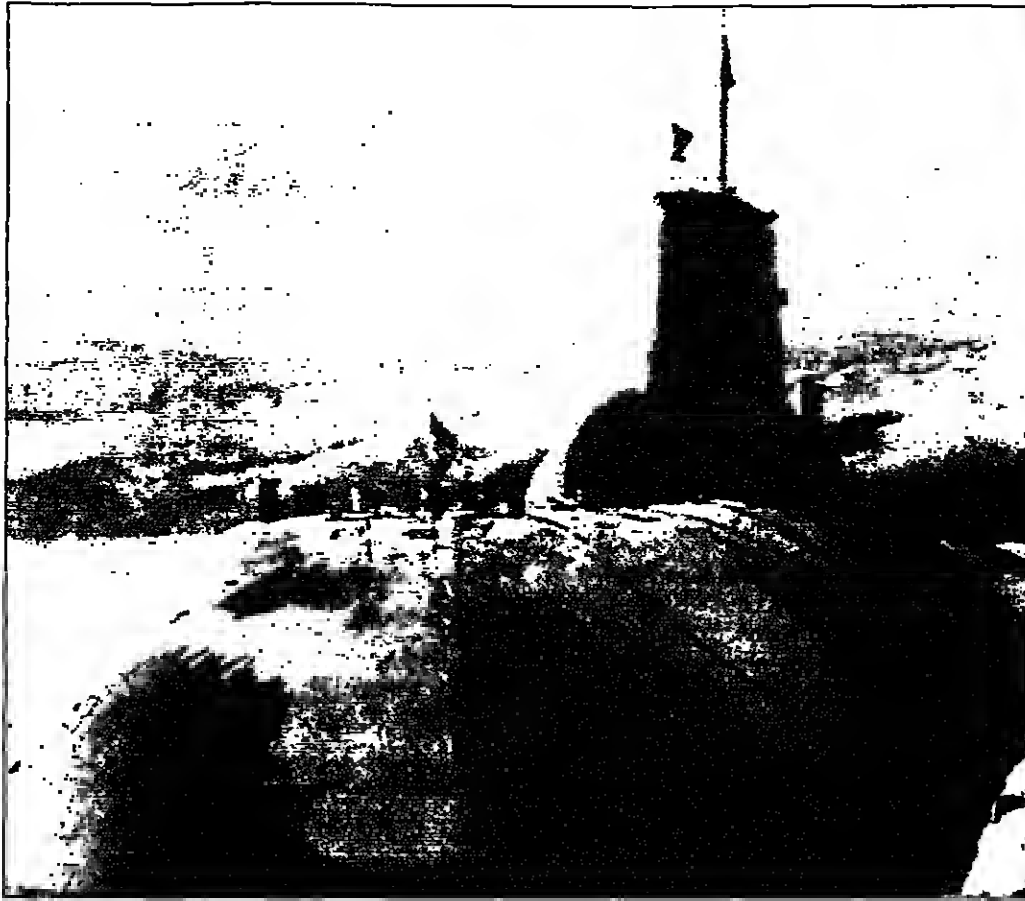
Yet something in him snapped. Neither possible cause is reassuring. Either he did, in fact, have a history of mental illness (in which case how did the navy let him near a nuclear-armed submarine?) or the Russian admiralty's reassurances that discipline on board the Bars was exemplary are wrong — and Kuzminykh had been provoked.

There is evidence to support the second theory. Not long before the murders, the sailor wrote his parents an odd letter, hinting he was having problems with other crew members. "The last thing you should do is worry about me," he wrote. "Either I'll drown, or I'll manage to stand up for myself." Shortly after the killings, his father said: "I reckon he must have endured some terrible humiliation for him to have done such a thing."

Violent bullying is chronic in the Russian armed forces. There is a tradition of "dyedovshchina," banded down with fists and boots from one group of conscripts to another, where the weakest recruits in a new intake are set upon by those who have already served out half of their two-year served out

'For a day and a night, the country was on the brink of a nuclear catastrophe. It would have been a second Chernobyl'

half of their two-year term. With the heightening of consciousness among minorities, conflicts can acquire an added dimension.



Sasha's identity card, and (far left) a Russian nuclear submarine similar to the one Sasha served time in (file photo)

Preoccupied with problems of survival and increasingly contemptuous of conscripts, officers turn a blind eye, or join in.

For years, the Russian military has maintained that its main nuclear forces — missile-carrying submarines and the land-based strategic rocket forces, or RVSN — have escaped these problems. The navy and the RVSN got the pick of the conscripts, who underwent additional background and mental health checks before being posted to nuclear units.

But, even in Soviet times, it is doubtful how effective these checks were. "There's a medical commission," says Captain Georgy Kurov, a former nuclear submarine commander. "At every call-up centre, the 9th department of the defence ministry, which controls nuclear weapons, selects the most sociologically fit people. But that doesn't mean someone who is ill, or who would become ill as a result of stress, couldn't slip through."

General Makhimovich Gareyev, president of Russia's military science academy, said: "The economic crises have dragged the level of young people's health and education sharply downwards. The armed forces simply have nothing to choose from. Not long ago, for the first time in 80 years, the navy's Northern Fleet got a conscript who was absolutely illiterate."

At the Moscow headquarters of the Soldiers' Mothers Committee, a charity which helps conscripts in trouble, Maria Fedulova took down a folder stuffed with cries for help from anxious families who have come to look on their sons' conscription as a two-year prison sentence. She showed the Guardian five cases from the last few months involving soldiers drafted into the RVSN, soldiers who guard intercontinental ballistic missiles.

The case of soldier V. "I learned from my son's letter that, after he got out of hospital and went back to his unit, they beat him again and he had to go back to hospital. He was

treated for inflammation of the lungs and gastritis. He lost 55 pounds. Now he has a swollen liver and low blood pressure. They promised to carry out a further medical examination. They didn't. They discharged him and sent him back to his unit."

Soldier S: "My son failed to return to his unit from leave on Aug. 26, 1998. They hadn't conscripted him for three years because he suffered from gall-bladder problems, chronic gastritis and skin disease. In 1996, they conscripted him. When he was his fifth year at school three boys raped him. There was a trial, one of the rapists was given 10 years, but they bribed him out of jail. As a result of this he was mentally disturbed when they took him into the armed forces. When he was home on leave he was more disturbed than ever. He couldn't come to terms with himself or control himself. Here's the result. He's drifting between life, death and the jailhouse. He wants to kill himself. Help us."

The Russian defence ministry argues that only officers and NCOs have direct access to nuclear weapons. But a conscript like Kuzminykh who runs amok with a weapon can still conceivably cause damage, by setting fires or creating explosions which could lead to the discharge of toxic nuclear materials. "Undoubtedly there could be harm done if there was an accident involving nuclear weapons, even if the weapons themselves didn't go off," said Captain Kurov. "Plutonium could be spread over a wide area. But this wouldn't be a global catastrophe. Remember, there are already five nuclear submarines on the ocean floor."

In Stanley Kubrick's blackly comic movie Dr. Strangelove, the director lays out an elaborate scenario for a nuclear disaster: A U.S. air force general goes mad and launches a B-52 bomber strike on the Soviet Union. Because of a loophole in the Pentagon's plans, the American bombers prove exceptionally difficult to recall. One nukes a Siberian community, triggering a global nuclear holocaust.

That was fantasy, albeit well-researched. But on July 24 this year, a former Russian general, Alexander Lebed, now governor of Krasnoyarsk, announced that he was considering taking control of a wing of intercontinental ballistic missiles in his region whose crews had not been paid for five months. The wives of officers had already staged a violent protest at the unit headquarters. "Hungry officers are angry officers," Lebed warned.

The general, running for the presidency in 2000, was making a rhetorical point. But the anger was all too real. Even if Russia's mili-

tary nuclear installations are safe from conscripts living off gruel and dogfood and occasionally shooting each other, what about the psychological state of the officers and NCOs themselves?

"What disturbs us is the state of the officers," said Fedulova, of Soldiers' Mothers. "The phenomenon of mass brutality in the ranks shows that they're not in control of themselves. About 200 officers have killed themselves this year."

The current defence minister, Igor Sergeev, has staggeringly little money to work with. The amount of cash the Russian military is currently receiving, to sustain 1.2 million men, is about £124 million a month — considerably less than Denmark, which offers NATO all of 33,000 troops and has no nuclear weapons. "It's a bitter business," says Captain Kurov. "Take the submarines. When they don't pay you and you go to sea, it's not clear how your family will get by without you. It's terrible."

Russian specialists rubbish the notion that hungry, angry, suicidal officers might be able to detonate, launch or steal nuclear weapons. Rear-Admiral Alexei Ovchinnikov told the Guardian: "A single person couldn't do anything with a ballistic missile on board a submarine. It's placed in a secure container, and can't be damaged, let alone launched."

But as long as the armed forces remain in their present state, doubts will remain. The

'Hungry officers are angry officers, Alexander Lebed, governor of Krasnoyarsk, warned'

scenario of crazed conscripts and suicidal officers — or simply bored, undertrained servicemen — watching over indestructible weapons of mass destruction sounds anything but stable. Who is watching the watchers for signs of trouble?

The Bars incident, and pressure from a Russian public hostile to the draft, is pushing the military to take action. Some 12,000 conscripts in the Moscow military district were recently subjected to repeat examinations, resulting in more than 100 being sent home, including 30 with mental problems. But until the Russian military is shrunk to a more manageable size — one the country can, at least, afford — parents like Sergei Kuzminykh are going to be left with their heads in their hands. "He was a quiet lad," he said of his son. "He never offended anyone. If someone offended him, well, he would do something about it."

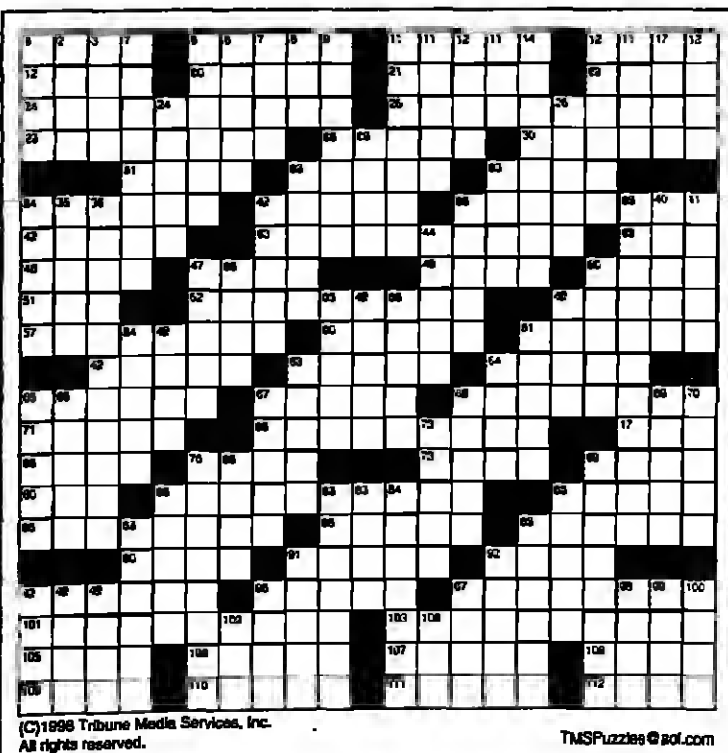
— The Guardian

The Saturday Crossword

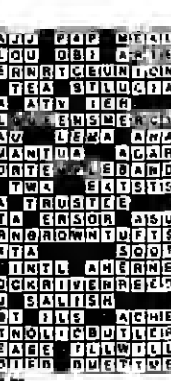
SCALE NOTES

By Edgar Fontaine, Dighton, Massachusetts

- 1 Practical sci.
- 5 Isolated state of
- 10 Islamic pilgrim's destination
- 15 Tour summer
- 19 Melville's sequel to "Typee"
- 20 Sister's daughter
- 21 Off to one side
- 22 "Love Songs" poet
- 23 Baseball or cube
- 25 Beatles song of 1968
- 26 Walking (on)
- 27 Approached
- 28 Climbing plants
- 30 Type of computer
- 31 Luis XIV and others
- 32 Teakbar images
- 33 Tasty
- 34 Greenish film
- 37 Winged
- 38 Interrupted
- 42 Air views
- 43 Pioneer of cool
- 44 Jazz
- 45 Pay attachment?
- 46 Wedding totem
- 47 Buffalo of the Calabes
- 49 Memorable times
- 50 Colonial black
- 51 Light knock
- 52 Like a studied course
- 56 Women in the kitchen?
- 57 Getting tangled
- 58 CEOK, VPs, and others
- 61 Hair ornament
- 62 Hanger-on
- 63 Do-it-yourself-leak-tide
- 64 Spouse
- 65 Longue
- 66 Leap of land
- 68 Ballet men
- 71 Word before kitchen or Angels
- 74 Sea deities
- 75 Building and one
- 76 Type of shirt?
- 78 Singer Anita
- 79 Bull, for short
- 80 Grow old
- 81 Whimsy singer?
- 82 Last security
- 83 Groceries
- 89 Dragster
- 90 Roman Catholic calendar
- 91 Russian king's poems
- 92 Indonesian island
- 93 King David's
- 94 Wind prof.
- 97 Male voice
- 101 Let by the
- 102 Bob Dylan hit
- 105 Surflet
- 106 Mother-of-pearl
- 107 Molluscoides
- 108 Pocket breed
- 109 Walked (on)
- 110 Gave medicine
- 111 Snow-day rides
- 112 Slaughter in Copenhagen
- DOWN
- 1 Borence
- 2 Biblical prophet
- 3 Boxing match
- 4 Serious
- 5 Lack of vigor
- 6 Fathers
- 7 Fancied player
- 8 High card
- 9 Insurance coverage
- 10 Leatherwings
- 11 Dangling sword
- 12 Ohio team, to fans
- 13 Allegory
- 14 Legendary island
- 15 Landed property
- 16 Follow
- 17 Last of a switch?
- 18 Carried a tune
- 24 Sierra
- 25 Modular parts
- 26 Back
- 27 Of a pelvic bone
- 28 Islands capital
- 29 Sailors' stopovers
- 30 Oil bees
- 31 In the company of
- 32 Simpson and
- 33 Maverick
- 39 "Last Dance"
- 40 Homeric epic
- 41 English anti-
- 42 Clear the
- 43 Plant with sweet seeds
- 48 Zik
- 49 Across Anouk
- 53 Surveillance, briefly
- 54 Prises
- 55 Perry Mason's Me.
- 56 Periods
- 58 Sire up liquid
- 59 Shaped
- 61 Flower with velvety petals
- 62 REM sound?
- 63 Yucatan Indians
- 64 Low-cost
- 65 Hagar the
- 66 Hemlock's lady
- 67 Pile up
- 68 Carpenter's grooves; var.
- 69 Juliet's boss
- 70 Excitatory, e.g.
- 73 Jaffe and Barrett
- 74 L.L. Bean rival
- 77 Mr. Preminger
- 79 Connecting kind
- 81 Physicist Enrico
- 82 Like some jacks
- 83 Address for a lady in Westerns
- 84 Bands inward
- 85 Unbroken
- 87 Shaped
- 88 Torment
- 89 REM sound?
- 92 Tied in bundles
- 93 Sibilant sound
- 94 Fly high
- 95 Palo CA
- 96 Rudiments
- 97 Eight bits
- 98 Kan or Lela
- 99 Western alliance, briefly
- 100 Unfed bird
- 102 Indian PM, after Rajiv Gandhi
- 104 Internet provider: abbr.



©1998 Tribune Media Services, Inc. All rights reserved.



Hardware forgery

By Jean-Claude Elias

WE ALL know about software piracy, but how many of us even suspect the existence of the other form of computer fraud — the forgery of microprocessors (CPUs, or Central Processing Units)? Distinguishing pirated software from the original is relatively easy. The difference in the packaging and the lack of original documentation, certificates, official registration and warranty cards are enough to tell you if you have bought an illegal or an original, authorised copy. That is when you don't already know it! However telling an original processor chip from a forged one is a more complex undertaking.

About two or three years ago, a new type of fraud has appeared which consists of "remarking" the essential, most expensive component in your PC, the Pentium CPU. How does it work? When a batch of chips is produced by a microprocessor manufacturer like Intel, they undergo a series of tests that aim to determine the performance they can deliver and the speed they can sustain. For exam-

ple, the units that pass the first test are marked 300 MHz (the speed of the chip), while those that pass the higher test are marked 333 MHz. Afterwards, when the chip is installed inside a PC the engineers set the clock rate of the machine to match that of the CPU. In other words, a CPU marked 300 MHz must work in a PC set at the same speed.

Though it should never be done, it is possible to force a CPU tested for 300 MHz to work at 333 MHz, by changing the computer's settings. But then problems are likely to appear: like overheating, sudden, unexpected computer halts, and other types of failures. Aware of this, forgers are taking CPUs, erasing — actually shaving — their original marks with special tools and then remarking them for a speed higher than the one they were successfully tested for. The obvious benefit for the forger is selling the processors at a higher price and making even bigger profits.

The obvious danger for the buyer, in addition to the illegal aspect of the whole operation, is a processor and consequently a computer that is any-

thing but reliable.

This new type of fraud is taking place in several countries in the region. At a workshop recently held in Amman, Tony Prince, an official from Intel, told the participants about the extent of the damage that CPUs remarking is doing to the Middle East market, to the users and to the credibility of Intel. He added that detecting the forgery is extremely difficult and that the only way to be sure you are buying an original Pentium — i.e. not remarked — is purchasing it from a reputable source. Some computer users have asked for a testing programme that would be easy to run and that would tell them if the Pentium inside their computer is running at the speed it is intended for, in other words if it is a remarked chip or not. Unfortunately such a piece of software is not available for the time being.

Whether software, hardware, carpets or shawarmah, the same old principle seems to apply when you want quality: buy from someone you trust.

chip talk



Asian Games

Abu Khadijeh hopes to win 1st gold medal

OCA reprimands Jordan Olympic Committee

By Aileen Bannayan
in Amman and Jordan sports
media reporters
in Bangkok

Jordanian athletes failed to clinch medals Friday but the delegation at the 13th Asian Games, currently under way in Bangkok, is anxiously awaiting the start of Saturday's heavyweight boxing bouts when Jordan has a shot at its first Asian gold.

With boxer Basel Hindawi, bronze medalist at the Pan-Arab Games, out of medal contention, one of Jordan's other medal hopefuls, boxer Ayman Nadi, a Pan-Arab Games gold medalist, lost on points to a Thai opponent Friday leaving only teammate Mohammed Abu Khadijeh with a chance at another medal for Jordan.

Abu Khadijeh, has won three gold medals within a year — at the 8th Pan-Arab Games, the West Asian Games in Tehran and the 18th Arab Boxing Championships in Tunisia.

Jordan's boxers are competing alongside 180 athletes from 31 nations in the event where the Kingdom hopes to win more medals to add to four already won so far — all in taekwondo.

Ibrahim Aqel won silver Thursday adding it to two other silver medals by Ala Kutkut, and Hussein Tahlh. Mohammed Farajeh won bronze.

The athletics competition gets under way Sunday with Fakhreddin Fuad — a high jump gold medalist at the Pan-Arab Games — hoping to be among medal winners.

The team had a training camp in Qatar where Fuad achieved 215 centimetres, and just came short of his record of 222.

Teammate Mohammad Abdul Baqi set a new Jordanian record in the triple jump with 15.53 — 18 centimetres more than his previous mark.

The karate team which includes Pan-Arab Games bronze medalist Butheina Mahsir, arrived in Bangkok Saturday as over half of Jordan's 56-member delegation prepared to return home Sunday.

The Kingdom took part alongside 40 other countries (only Saudi Arabia and

Afghanistan missed the event) in the last sporting event of the century with 19 officials and 37 athletes.

Jordan took part in 11 sports: athletics, boxing, bowling, gymnastics, judo, karate, shooting, squash, swimming, weightlifting and taekwondo.

Although the Jordan Olympic Committee (JOC) carefully screened each participating federation's athletes and preparations to enlist the best athletes in each sport, apart from taekwondo so far, the rest of the sports produced disappointing results.

In squash, the country's top player Mohammad Saeed lost 3-0 in the quarter-finals to one of Pakistan's top players — Zarak Khan. Jordan's Majd Njada also lost 3-0 to players from Hong Kong.

In taekwondo, Nancy Hindi, Zaha Talhouini, Luma Abu Judum, Ali Asmar, Alisar Matar, Mohammad Ahul Ruz and Ahlam Bino lost their bouts. The rest of their teammates secured Jordan's four medals so far.

In judo, Mousa Khalaf, a silver medalist at the Pan Arab Games, was eliminated, alongside Rami Dasouqi and Tawfiq Suleiman.

In gymnastics, Jordan's Ahmad Abdo and Shadi Khouri obtained 45th and 47th places respectively.

In swimming, Pan-Arab Games bronze medalist Hana Majaj came in 18th with a time 1:13.16 in the 100-metre butterfly. She will take part in the 200-metre today.

In shooting, Aysar Hiyari failed to qualify while the rest of his teammates continue competition today.

Jordan is yet to win gold at the Asian Games. In the past two participations in the Seoul '86 and Hiroshima '94, Jordan's sole medals were achieved through taekwondo with three silver and five bronze medals.

Jordan is not taking part in team sports — notably soccer, handball and basketball due to reason pertaining to their respective federations.

The JOC has underlined the importance of taking part in the Asian Games saying it was "an invaluable chance to assess our teams and pinpoint our location on the map of Asian

sports being part of plans of the Ministry of Culture and Youth to prepare teams for the upcoming Pan-Arab Games in Amman next summer and the 2000 Sydney Olympics."

OCA reprimands JOC

Meanwhile, the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) reprimanded the Jordan Olympic Committee after the country's top weight lifter, Ayed Khawaldeh, tested positive for banned substances.

Khawaldeh became the first athlete to test positive at the Bangkok Games Wednesday and failed a second test Thursday.

He immediately disqualified and expelled from the Games village by the OCA which held an emergency meeting and handed the matter to the sport's governing body to impose international suspension which will bar him from the Pan-Arab Games.

OCA chief Sheikh Ahmad Al Fahd expressed dismay at the positive test especially since it involved an "Arab country."

"I'm really surprised since the weightlifter did not actually have a chance at an advanced position," he told AFP.

Khawaldeh, 25, who finished seventh among fifteen participants in the 56-kilogramme class, was found to have taken the diuretic Triamterene.

He was caught in a random test after setting a new Arab record and had expressed hope to win gold at the Pan-Arab Games.

Khawaldeh said his Chinese coach has instructed him to take the medicine during the West Asian Games in Tehran and during another championship in Algeria last year, and did not know that it contained a banned substance.

Jordanian delegation officials ordered his return home Wednesday. He is expected to serve a two-year suspension, and will therefore miss the

Khawaldeh was the first Jordanian to win three bronze medals in one event at the 8th Pan-Arab Games in Beirut last summer.

Tired Zhang hands Iranian gold medal

BANGKOK (AFP) — World champion Zhang Yong put in a surprise under-par display to hand Shahin Nassirinia of Iran the men's 85kg gold medal in the Asian Games weightlifting here on Friday.

The tired Zhang went out of the medal hunt in the first 30 minutes when he missed his opening three tries at a moderate 150kg in the snatch.

Zhang, whose world record in the clean and jerk stands at 218kg, managed only 200kg after three desperate tries to finish last in the 12-man competition.

As Zhang hurried to defeat, Iranian Shahin put in his best performance of 170kg in the snatch and 210kg in the clean and jerk to emerge champion with an overall tally of 380kg.

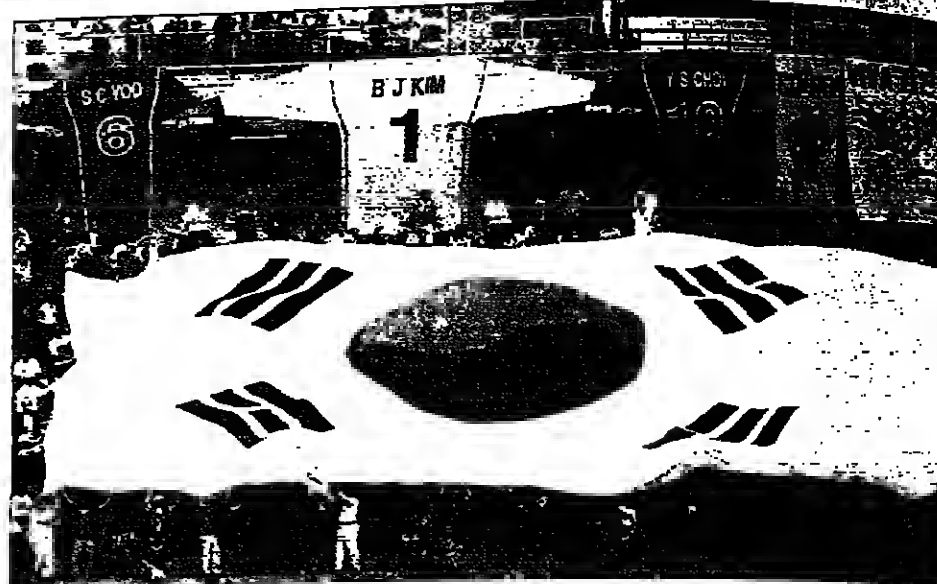
China took the silver through Zhang's understudy Yuan Aijun, who finished with 370kg. The bronze went to Bahtiyar Nurullaev of Uzbekistan with a total of 347.5kg.

Chinese officials pinned the blame for Zhang's lacklustre performance to fatigue.

"He was tired after the world championships last month," one official said. "But he will come back in the next competition."

Friday's defeat was only the second by the Chinese lifters at the Games in 10 events. The first came on Wednesday when South Korea's Kim Hak-Bong won the men's 69kg.

Nine of the eleven world records set in the competition have been by the Chinese, but all by their powerful women lifters.



South Korean football fans display a giant flag and national team uniforms at the Rajamangala stadium in Bangkok during South Korea's game against Kuwait in the second round of the soccer competition at the 13th Asian Games. South Korea won 0 (AFP photo)

MEDAL TABLE

Country	G	S	B	Total
China	61	44	26	131
Japan	23	26	32	81
South Korea	20	13	23	56
Kazakhstan	11	11	16	38
Thailand	7	11	19	37
Chinese Taipei	7	4	14	25
North Korea	4	9	4	17
Iran	3	3	7	13
Mongolia	2	0	4	6
Uzbekistan	1	7	7	15
Malaysia	2	3	4	9
Vietnam	1	2	3	6
Kuwait	1	2	2	5
Indonesia	1	2	5	8
Pakistan	1	0	1	2
Turkmenistan	1	0	0	1
Jordan	0	3	1	4
Myanmar	0	2	1	3
Kyrgyzstan	0	2	0	2
Philippines	0	1	6	7
Nepal	0	1	2	3
Hong Kong	0	0	4	4
Total	146	146	181	473

S. Korea outshine Japanese youngsters

BANGKOK (AFP) — South Korea managed to put one over on fellow World Cup 2002 hosts Japan by qualifying for the quarter-finals of the Asian Games while their age-old arch rivals were left to book their tickets back to Tokyo.

The Japanese were unable to overcome the United Arab Emirates, losing 1-0 when a victory was required to take Philippe Troussier's side through to the knock-out phase of the competition.

In contrast the Koreans completed the group with a 100 per cent record, defeating a visibly tiring Kuwait side thanks to Choi Yong-soo's seventh goal of the tournament.

Both Japan and South Korea sent experimental sides to the Games with both having an eye on the Olympic Games in Sydney and, more importantly, the next World Cup finals.

Japan's side was made up entirely of players from the nation's under 19 side that represented the country at the Asian Youth Championship in Chiangmai and played from the side that reached the quarter-finals of the World Youth Championship in Malaysia last year.

But they suffered from a lack of experience as a result while the Koreans profited from mixing the cream of the country's university teams with five senior players almost all of whom have World Cup experience.

Leading by example was Choi, who struck from the edge of the Kuwait penalty area today to maintain Korea's charge towards the gold medal.

Korea have won the gold medal in the Asian Games more times than any other nation and Huh is hoping that 1998 can be another golden year.

Korea's best saw them top group two with nine points out of nine and beat Japan, Kuwait and the UAE, three of the top sides in Asia at the moment. But whether it is enough to take them all the way to the final remains to be seen.

Also looking for a place in the final are defending champions Uzbekistan who will be joined in the quarter-finals from group one by fellow former Soviet side Turkmenistan.

The pair drew 1-1 today to ensure they finished ahead of North Korea and India. The Koreans finished third in the group after beating India 2-0.



Ibrahim Aqel of Jordan (L) kicks Kim Je-Gyoung of South Korea (R) during their men's heavyweight final match of taekwondo. Aqel was defeated by Kim to clinch the silver medal (AFP photo)



Japanese swimmer Takashi Yamamoto celebrates after winning a new Asian Games record time the men's 200m butterfly at the 13th Asian Games in Bangkok. Yamamoto clocked 1:56.75 to set the new record and pocketed the gold medal (AFP photo)

China's swimming world champs come through

BANGKOK (AFP) — Wu Yanyan and Chen Yan finally fulfilled expectations but unheralded teammate Chen Hua continued to surpass them as China grabbed three swimming gold medals Friday at the Asian Games.

World record-holders Wu and Chen Yan repeated their

one-two world championships finish in the women's 200m medley. And even though Wu's winning time of 2:15.12 was well outside her world record of 2:13.16, the gold medal she earned served China's purposes all the same.

Chen Yan, the 400m med-

ley world record holder and world champion who was relegated to third in her signature event on Monday, returned after skipping two races with a stomach illness to further assist her country's fierce battle with Japan for swimming supremacy.

But it was relatively inexperienced Chen Hua who

captured her third gold medal of the games, adding the 800m freestyle to her 400m free and 4 x 200m free relay titles.

Chen Hua and Japan's Sachiko Yamada were neck and neck for most of the race, but the Chinese began to edge ahead with 200 metres to go and went on to

win in 8:38.00, with Yamada second in 8:39.21 and Eri Yamanoi of Japan third in 8:56.90.

"I was behind the Japanese, but I was confident of overtaking her," said Chen Hua, who struggled with a cold that gave her a fever before the 400m free on Wednesday.

Iran 4th Exhibition (Amman)

Location:
Jordan Sports Federation for the Handicapped
(Behind Sports City Complex)

The Hashemite Association for
International Economic Cooperation

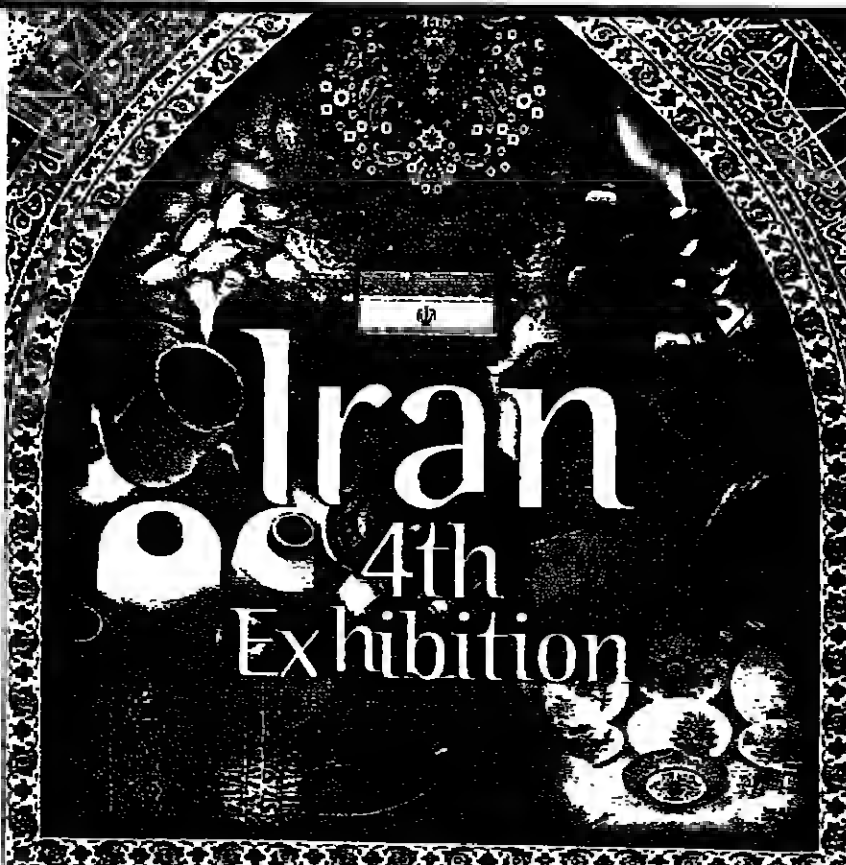
The Embassy of the Islamic
Republic of Iran

12-18/12/1998
from 11:00am - 10:00pm

Exhibited
Items For
Sale

IDROEXPO

الجمعية الأردنية للمعاقمين



TODAY AT	<div>CINEMA TEL: 4654444</div> <div>PHILADELPHIA '1'</div> <div>Richard Gere .. in</div> <div>RED CORNER</div> <div>Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30</div>	<div>CINEMA TEL: 4654444</div> <div>PHILADELPHIA '2'</div> <div>Jeff Bridges .. in</div> <div>WHITE SQUALL</div> <div>Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30</div>	<div>CINEMA TEL: 5934793</div> <div>PLAZA</div> <div>Comedian Mohammad Huneidi .. in</div> <div>SAEEDI AT THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY</div> <div>Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30</div>	<div>CINEMA TEL: 5934793</div> <div>CONCORDE</div> <div>CONCORDE "1" Patrick Swayze .. in the action-packed film</div> <div>BLACK DOG</div> <div>Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30</div> <div>CONCORDE "2" FRENCH KISS</div> <div>Shows: 3:30, 5:30</div>	<div>CINEMA TEL: 5934793</div> <div>GALLERIA 1</div> <div>ABDOUN www.cns.com.jo/Galleria</div> <div>Antonio Banderas .. in</div> <div>THE MASK OF ZORRO</div> <div>Shows: 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30</div>	<div>CINEMA TEL: 5934793</div> <div>GALLERIA 2</div> <div>ABDOUN www.cns.com.jo/Galleria</div> <div>Comedian Mohammad Huneidi .. in</div> <div>SAEEDI AT THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY</div> <div>Shows: 3:30, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30</div>	<div>Risham Yanes Theatre TEL: 4625155</div> <div>Watch out for the new play</div>
----------	---	---	--	---	---	--	--

Listings for films and showing times as received by cinemas and their advertising agencies.



congratulates

congratulates

congratulates

congratulates

congratulates

congratulates

congratulates

congratulates

congratulates

congratulates

congratulates

congratulates

congratulates

congratulates

congratulates

congratulates

congratulates

congratulates

congratulates

congratulates

congratulates

congratulates

congratulates

congratulates

congratulates

congratulates

congratulates

LOCAL SPORTS SCENE



King congratulates Princess Alia

ABU DHABI — His Majesty King Hussein has congratulated HRH Princess Alia, president of the Jordan Equestrian Federation, for the national team's fifth place finish at the World Endurance Race. In his telephone call, the King expressed greetings and appreciation for the team's efforts among 39 countries taking part. Meanwhile, in the individual three-day event, the athletes achieved halfway position of 45-50 among 175 participants.

Games venues decided

AMMAN — The 9th Pan-Arab Games Executive Committee has decided to go ahead with holding the event's gymnastics and badminton championship at the Sports Palace in Amman. The committee accredited stadiums of the Royal Automobile Club and Young Women's Christian Association to hold tennis training during the games, which will be held in Amman Aug. 15-31, 1999. The sailing competition was rejected.

Judo to enlist Japanese coach

AMMAN — The Jordan Judo Federation is continuing efforts to hire a trainer to supervise national teams. Federation spokesperson Hassan Ustah said contacts are under way with Japan and Bulgaria to find a qualified coach to do the job.

Compiled by Ahmad Khatib

Compromise over \$100,000 prize for athletes

BANGKOK (AFP) — Asian Games organisers have come up with a compromise formula so they can award a \$100,000 prize for the best athlete without infringing 'share of prize' rules.

The award is being made for the first time as the Olympic Council of Asia seeks to heighten the profile of the Asiad. Such awards are handed at the Olympics and the size of prize money varies between nations and sports federations. Many of them would strictly follow rules on professionalism and not let athletes accept it.

About 70 per cent of the 6,700 athletes from 36 sports at the Bangkok Games are amateurs.

Under the compromise, the award given by the Samsung company will be made to the athlete, but the money will go to the athlete's national Olympic committee.

A statement released by the Bangkok Asian Games Organising Committee (BAGOC) said the money should be transferred towards the athlete's training and other expenses.

But a Samsung spokesman admitted that once the money was paid to the national Olympic committee it was up to them what they did with it.

Several governments have offered huge cash awards for gold medal at the Asian Games.

The Singapore government has promised \$150,000 for a gold medal, but has yet to find a taker. It only got one gold medal in Hiroshima four years ago.

Any Taiwanese title winner stands to get at least \$85,000, while a Chinese gold medalist could win \$128,000.

BAGOC secretary general Major General Charouk Chakrakarn said the first Games award would be an inspiration to athletes.

This award is a major boost to amateur sport in Asia and will provide even more motivation for athletes to do their best at the Games," he said.

The Most Valued Performance award will be voted by a committee of journalists and BAGOC and OCA officials. It will be presented by the OCA president Sheikh Ahmad al-Sabah at the Games closing ceremony on December 20.

DUTY FREE CAR FOR SALE

SAAB 900S - 1996
MILEAGE: 47,000 KM
COLOR: BLUE METALIC
LEATHER INTERIOR - FULL OPTION
TEL: 5620923

The Regional Office of an International Company in the Electrical Engineering Field is seeking for immediate employment

IT MANAGER / FINANCIAL ASSISTANT

Candidates for this position should have the following qualifications:

- Excellent command of English.
- A generalist approach.
- Advanced know-how in Information Systems (including Networks & Data-Communication)
- Accounting knowledge.
- Communicative and positive personality.
- Self-motivated and dynamic mode of working.
- Flexibility.
- 25 - 35 years old.

Interested candidates should send their applications including C.V. and a recent photo to the following address latest by December 24th, 1998:

Attn.: Subregional Controller
P.O. Box 926 098 Amman 11110, Jordan
Fax No. 562 1369

Ginola wants to stay with Tottenham

LONDON (AFP) — French star David Ginola on Friday confirmed that he wishes to remain with English Premiership side Tottenham for the rest of his career.

Winger Ginola was widely expected to the first big-name casualty at White Hart Lane under new manager George Graham, but he has flourished in recent weeks, producing a string of top-class performances.

Ginola said: "I want to feel at home here — to stay and help Tottenham to the top of the League. Since George Graham arrived, we're playing better with every game."

"I want to see my long-term future with this club but one day I realise they might say I'm not in their plans. At the moment, though, Spurs is a big love for me."

"This is a big club and we have to be at the top of the Premiership. When you play for Spurs, you need to play in Europe. If I was a young player here, I'd feel disappointed."

Tottenham are in the semi-finals of the League Cup and Ginola told the London Evening Standard: "The time is now to win something. I want to play in Europe again with Spurs."

Samaranch orders inquiry into Salt Lake City corruption claim

LAUSANNE (AFP) — International Olympic Committee (IOC) president Juan Antonio Samaranch on Friday ordered an inquiry into an alleged case of corruption involving Salt Lake City's successful bid to host the 2002 Winter Olympics.

Relatives of six African IOC members received grants totalling half a million dollars to study at American universities at the time when Utah was presenting its candidacy to stage the games, an IOC source said here on Friday.

The financial arrangement came to light following the disclosure of a draft letter telling a Cameroon surgeon and long-time IOC member that the Salt Lake Organising Committee (SLOC) was no longer able to guarantee paying for his daughter's studies in Washington.

The surgeon, Professor Rene Essomha, who was elected onto the IOC in 1978, died in August.

"We can't do a great deal other than bring this matter out into the open," said

Marc Hodler, an IOC member and president of the association of international federations of winter olympic sports.

Despite the investigation, Hodler rejected any possibility of taking the 2002 Games away from Salt Lake City, explaining that the existing SLOC was made up of completely different members to that at the time of the vote in Budapest in June 1995.

SLOC president Frank Joklik said that the grants were aimed at helping

young athletes from developing nations.

He added that the SLOC would help shed light on the affair but insisted that Salt Lake City would have won the right to host the games without the votes.

Salt Lake City easily defeated its rivals when the host was decided in Budapest, receiving 54 votes against 14 each for Sion, Switzerland, and Ostersund, Sweden, and seven for Quebec City, Canada.

Wanted: Asiad star, charisma and brilliance required

BANGKOK (AFP) — Every Asian Games produces a larger-than-life athletics champion who dominates the event through either charisma, brilliance, or both.

Bangkok, like Hiroshima four years ago, seems certain to rely on the sprinters for star quality.

Two top-class sprinters, Japan's Koji Ito and Sri Lanka's Susantika Jayasinghe, look perfectly placed to take centre stage here, following in the footsteps of Talal Mansoor.

Mansoor, a Qatari soldier from Doha, won an unprecedented third successive Asian Games 100 metre crown in 1994, winning in 10.18 seconds following a drama-packed race featuring an extraordinary five false starts and one disqualification.

He then clinched the sprint double with the 200 title and claimed a relay bronze to become Hiroshima's man to remember.

The 28-year-old Ito, who took the 200m silver behind Mansoor four years ago and who is currently in the form of his life, is looking for his first Games titles to rubber-stamp him as Asia's fastest man.

He already holds the 200m Asian record (20.16) and shares the 100m mark (10.08) with compatriot Nubharu Asahara. He won an Asian Championships gold earlier this year and broke into the world's top 30. All that is missing is confirmation of his new-found stature at Asia's "Olympics."

Jayasinghe, meanwhile, a rags-to-riches village girl who took the world silver in Athens last year, also wants her first Asiad title after coming runner-up in 1994.

Some here, however, may see her as more villain than hero when the main athletics programme gets underway here on Sunday.

The 22-year-old is facing a probe into a failed drugs test dating back to April which could see her stripped of any medals she wins here.

Several other athletes shone four years

ago in Hiroshima but failed the personality test to challenge Mansoor.

China's Wang Junxia ran what was then the seventh-fastest 10,000m of all time, while her teammate Qu Yunxia, like Wang a world record holder, won an 800-1,500m double.

But where was the joy of victory? Neither was able to capture the public imagination and both were kept tightly under wraps by their coach Ma Junren.

Others were on their way up. Ghada Shouaa of Syria, then unknown and virtually unnoticed, won the heptathlon. Three years later she was world champion but will not be here to defend her title because of injury.

Kazak Olga Shishigina, meanwhile, stunned the Chinese by stealing the 100m hurdles title. By the Athens World Championships last year, she had become the second best hurdler in the world.

She will be back in Bangkok but — like Jayasinghe — may struggle to win the public's affection after returning from a lengthy drugs ban.

Qatari Mohammad Suleiman, the 1992 Olympics bronze medalist, could challenge the sprinters here for the accolade of the athlete of the Games.

Suleiman is unbeaten in the Asian Games and Asian Championships since 1990.

But his laid-back style — he never indulges in Mansoor-style celebrations and histrionics when he wins — may count against him.

If character and longevity, rather than a gold medal, were enough, India's P.T. Usha would become the athlete of the Asiad.

In Seoul in 1986 she won four golds and a silver. Now a 35-year-old mother, Usha, who retired briefly in 1990, is here for her swansong.

She is unlikely to come away from Bangkok a champion. But any medal, in the 200m, 400m or even the relay, would be a true victory for one of Asia's ever-green greats.

Meissnitzer completes double triumph

VAL D'ISERE (AFP) —

Alexandra Meissnitzer of Austria completed an impressive double when she won the women's World Cup giant slalom race here on Friday.

Meissnitzer, the World Cup overall leader, won just 24

hours after taking out a Super-G race on Thursday.

The policewoman clocked a combined time of 2min 17.34sec for the two runs, finishing 0.82sec ahead of second-placed Deborah Compagnoni of Italy.

Austrian veteran Anita Wachner was third.

Meissnitzer was fastest over the morning run and increased her advantage in the second run.

It was her fourth win of the season.

THE ROYAL NETHERLANDS EMBASSY

with the sponsorship of
AMSTEL (THE FIRST IN JORDAN)

is proud to announce the showing of
the Oscar winning film

KARAKTER (CHARACTER)

in the framework of
the European Union Film festival
The film will be shown at
The Royal Cultural Centre
on

TUESDAY 15 DECEMBER at 20:00 hrs and
WEDNESDAY 16 DECEMBER at 17:00 hrs.

* Entrance fee JD1 * Students 500 fils.

Tickets and a programme booklet are available at the
Royal Cultural Centre.

Profits will go to the
MABARRAT UM AL HUSSEIN

Jordan Design & Trade Center of
Noor Al Hussein Foundation

Cordially invites you to attend

The Nabataean
Silver Jewelry Exhibition

An exhibition of Nabataean Jewelry exclusively
designed by Hana Rihani



(This Exhibition runs from Dec. 12th - Dec. 31st)

Opening hours 8:00 AM - 7:00 PM

Ramadan hours 8:00 AM - 4:00 PM

Tel: 5699141/2 Fax 5685298

(Off Wadi Saqra Street, between King Abdullah Gardens & Safeway, 2nd night after gas station)

Thai Airways plane crashes 44 survive, 35 confirmed dead

SURAT THANI (AFP) — A Thai Airways Airbus jet carrying 146 people, among them foreign tourists, crashed in driving rain in southern Thailand, with officials fearing early Sunday most had perished.

The Airbus A310-200 was carrying 132 passengers, mainly holidaymakers, and 14 crew from Bangkok to the southern city of Surat Thani.

Provincial Deputy Governor Niwat Sawaskao told AFP early Saturday there were 44 survivors, with at least 35 confirmed dead as rescuers brought out bodies on rowing boats from a swamp near Surat Thani airport.

"I think it is likely there will be no more survivors," Niwat said.

Rescuers worked through the night searching through debris, but efforts were hampered by high water levels in the swamp where the aircraft crashed on approach to Surat Thani airport.

Flight TG-261 crashed and burst into flames at a rubber

plantation after two failed landing attempts during a driving tropical storm at Surat Thani airport, close to the holiday island of Koh Samui.

One witness said the aircraft broke into three pieces.

Visibility was very poor as tropical storm Jill lashed the region.

"The pilot tried to make two landings and told passengers if he could not land a third time he would take the plane back to Bangkok," said a steward who survived the crash.

"Then we were told to be ready for a crash landing and the plane came down," he told Thai television from his hospital bed.

Television pictures showed bloodied and shaken survivors, some of them Westerners, walking or being carried through the wreckage in darkness and driving rain.

Some were in their underwear, their clothes having been torn from them in the crash. The faces of most were covered in mud or blood.

The jet was on a flight from Bangkok to Surat Thani, 640 kilometres to the south. Most of the passengers were holidaymakers heading for islands off the coast.

Niwat said six of those confirmed dead, five women and a man, were foreigners, but no nationalities were given.

Thai Airways said in a statement there were 27 foreigners — updating an earlier figure of 19 — and 105 Thais on board.

Thai Airways released a provisional passenger list with English, German and Japanese names, but these had yet to be confirmed. Among the dead was Thai member of parliament Thawat Wichaidit.

Survivors were ferried from the crash site in police vans, others on pickup trucks driven by locals who heard the crash and rushed to the scene.

One of those rescued from the wreckage was the captain, police said.

Rescue workers said the fire was concentrated in the rear of the jet.

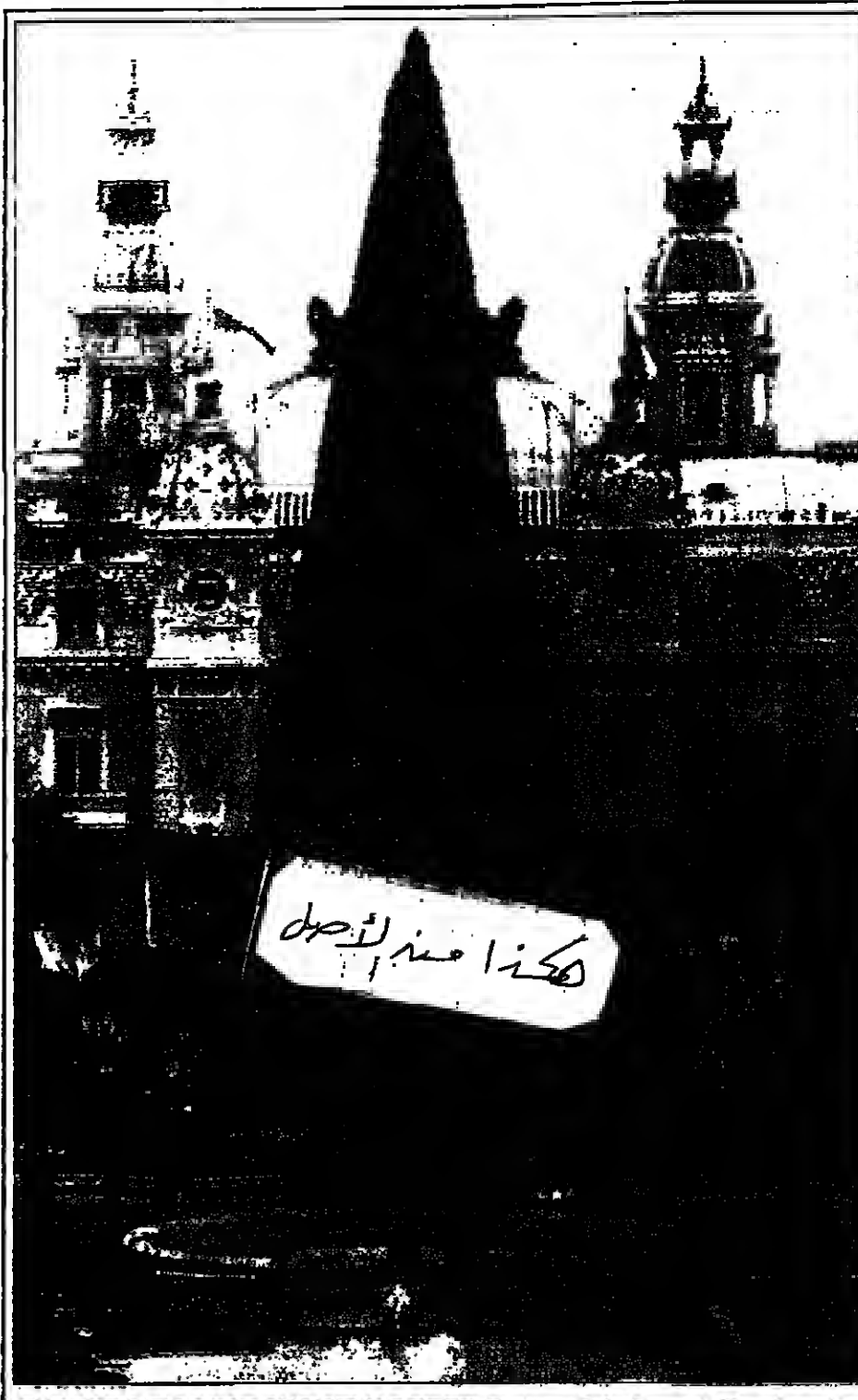
Transport Minister Sijbed Thumugsuban rushed to the crash site to coordinate rescue efforts, officials said.

The crash occurred at about 6:45 p.m. local time, the Thai Airways statement said.

French aeronautics experts — three from the Bureau of Accident Enquiry and five from Airbus Industry — are headed for Thailand to help Thai authorities investigate the cause of the crash.

Airbus Industry said the A310-200 had been delivered to Thai Airways in April 1986 and, by the end of October, the twin-engine aircraft had put in 23,000 flying hours.

News quickly spread through Koh Samui of the crashed jet bringing more holidaymakers to the island, nervous tourists gathered in front of television sets along the main street front of Chaweng beach, the most popular on the island which started as a backpackers' paradise in the 1970s and became a playground for the rich.



EUROPE'S BIGGEST CHRISTMAS TREE: Picture of the biggest Christmas tree in Europe, in front of Monaco's Casino on Friday. It is 27.40-metre high, its surface is 470 square metres, and is decorated with 6000 Christmas baubles and 170,000 red and white lights. Last year, the Christmas tree was destroyed by a fire, 3 days before Christmas (AFP photo)

Ocalan says he will quit party leadership

ROME (AFP) — Kurdish rebel leader Abdullah Ocalan, under house arrest near here since last month, will quit the presidency of his separatist party in order to "play a personal role" in international politics, he said in an interview published Friday.

Ocalan said he would announce his resignation late Friday on the Brussels-based Kurdish Med-TV television.

"I have decided to quit the presidency of the PKK [Kurdish Labour Party] to be able to play a personal role on the international scene," Ocalan told the left-wing newspaper Il manifesto.

The PKK was about to be revamped and would pursue a new policy, he added. "This is why I am going to resign from the presidency."

Ocalan said the PKK's Marxist-Leninist-style programme would be revised, "abolishing the idea of real socialism, namely the party first, then the state and then human beings."

But asked about the party's armed struggle for a Kurdish homeland, he told the paper "there will be no change if there is no dialogue and a real peace process."

Ocalan was to be questioned Friday by Roman

prosecutor Giancarlo Capaldo on how he managed to fly to Rome, where he was detained on international warrants on Nov. 12. The PKK leader arrived from Russia.

Capaldo would also interrogate him on his statements about a failed attempt on the life of Pope John Paul II by Turkish right-wing extremist Ali Agca in 1981.

Ocalan said Sunday he was ready to testify about the assassination attempt and also about the 1986 slaying of Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme.

"I do not know the details and have no formal proof of these two attacks

but I intend to let the judges know about the Turkish political situation after the 1980 military coup d'etat, during the period when the two attacks took place," he told ANSA news agency in an interview.

Turkey wants Ocalan extradited for spearheading the Kurdish drive for independence but Rome has rejected this, arguing that Italian law prevents the handing over of a defendant to a country like Turkey which has the death penalty.

The refusal has provoked a wave of anti-Italian boycotts and protests in Turkey.

OAU ends Comoros mission as exodus continues from Anjouan

MORONI (AFP) — Mutsumudu, the main town of the Comoran separatist island Anjouan, emptied further on Friday as the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) completed a preparatory mission for an intervention force there.

The mission, comprising generals from six African countries, went early Friday to Moheli, the smallest of the three islands making up the Comoros Federation, between the main Grande Comores island and Anjouan, before leaving Moroni in the afternoon, the OAU office here said.

The OAU team, which had arrived in the Comoran capital on Wednesday, did not go to Anjouan, where factional fighting Saturday through Monday claimed 24 lives, according to the government.

Anjouan unilaterally declared independence from Moroni in August 1997, and Moheli quickly followed suit, but this year rejoined the federation.

The generals, from South Africa, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Kenya and Tanzania, gathered technical information preparatory to sending an intervention force to Anjouan at the request of the Moroni government.

Mutsumudu was calm late Thursday, according to refugees who arrived in Moroni by boat early Friday, although people were continuing to flee. Nearly all expatriates have been evacuated to Moroni or to the neighbouring French-ruled island of Mayotte.

Militiamen backing separatist "President" Abdullah Ibrahim have been surrounded for nearly a week by those loyal to the former "prime minister," Mohammad Abdou.

The OAU mission is to produce a report to be examined in the Burkina Faso capital Ouagadougou at an OAU summit next Thursday and

Friday. OAU Secretary General Salim Ahmed Salim said in Pretoria on Wednesday that African leaders should make an "ultimate decision" on military intervention requested by the Comoran government.

"Since June, the use of force has been the last possible solution under consideration. What disturbs us now is the extent of the violence that is taking place," Salim told a press conference in Pretoria, adding that intervention might be necessary to "avoid further deterioration of the situation."

On Thursday, authorities in the port of Mutsumudu, which is still under the control of pro-Abdullah militiamen, for the first time used documents bearing the letterhead of the Moroni government.

A show that arrived in Moroni early Friday from Anjouan bore Comoran stamps instead of "State of Anjouan" stamps, a port official told AFP.

No explanation was given for the change, but it may signal a shift in Abdullah's position that could facilitate new negotiations for returning Anjouan to central administration.

No government has recognised Anjouan's independence, and an earlier bid to return to French tutelage was rebuffed by Paris.

All telephone links with Anjouan were cut on Friday, Comoran

Telecommunications Director Omar Mgomri told AFP.

The humanitarian situation on the island remains worrying. An initial delivery of emergency aid from France including 3.5 tonnes of medicines, medical kits and milk for children was held up in Mayotte on Friday awaiting a vessel to transport it, an informed source here said.

A doctor and pharmacist of the group Humanitarian Action are to accompany the aid, and they will assess emergency needs on the island, the French foreign ministry said.

Lebanon frees supporters of anti-Syrian general

BEIRUT (AFP) — Some 51 supporters of exiled anti-Syrian General Michel Aoun were freed on Friday, a day after their arrests sparked protests against the Syrian military presence in Lebanon.

Students at the American University of Beirut and the Saint-Joseph University boycotted classes and held sit-ins on the campus on Friday against "violations of democratic liberties... including the right to demonstrate."

On Thursday, 40 student supporters of Aoun were arrested and questioned by authorities for distributing copies of an Aoun speech marking the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Eleven more Aoun supporters were detained during an evening sit-in held in front of a police station in Beirut by Aoun's Free National Current to protest the earlier arrests.

During the candle-lit protests, the students shouted slogans denouncing the presence of 35,000 Syrian troops in Lebanon.

"Get out Syria. We want neither Jews nor Syrians. We want the Lebanese army," they shouted, referring also to the Israeli occupation of a border strip in southern Lebanon.

Aoun, who headed a military government in 1988-1989, was toppled by a Syrian-backed offensive against his palace outside Beirut in 1990, forcing him to flee to France where he still lives.

In Aoun's speech distributed on Friday, he described the Syrian military presence as equal to the Israeli occupation of the south.

"To protect these occupations, the designated authorities are repressing liberties and manipulating the press... the regime is committing all crimes to ensure its continuity," he said.

U.S. can no longer block Iran's missile programme — Rafsanjani

TEHRAN (AFP) — Former Iranian President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani said Friday that his country's missile technology was far enough advanced that any further U.S. efforts to block its development would be futile.

"The pressure they are applying on this issue is useless. Thank God, it has gotten out of their [U.S.] control. We have reached the point we should have reached," Rafsanjani said, referring to U.S. pressure on Russia to stop the transfer of missile know-how and equipment to Iran.

"Iran is self-sufficient in missile technology. Iran now really knows how to manufacture missiles and has no need for help from any countries — be it Russia, China or any other country," he said at weekly Friday prayers at Tehran University.

A delegation of U.S. officials is currently in Moscow to try to persuade Russia to stop weapons cooperation with the Islamic Republic.

The United States accuses Iran of pursuing secret nuclear and mass destruction weapons programmes, charges Iran has repeatedly denied.

U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright on Wednesday threatened to end America's scientific cooperation with Moscow if Russia did not keep its promise to stop providing technology for Iran's missile and nuclear programmes.

"In the absence of real enforcement of the Russian government's stated position opposing cooperation with Iran, these programmes will be difficult to sustain," a U.S. official quoted her as saying.

In July, Iran announced it had successfully tested a medium range missile known as Shahab-3 able to reach most countries in the region including Israel and two months later it pledged to develop its programme with the Shahab-4 and Shahab-5.

And on Friday, the official news agency IRNA said that the Iranian army had successfully tested the Fajr-4 ballistic missile during war games in the Gulf.

Rafsanjani said Iran started its missile programme from scratch during the 1980-1988 war against Iraq, after Iraqi

forces launched missile attacks against Iranian cities.

"The Americans exert pressure so that we will not have missiles. But the war showed that this is out natural right. It showed that we have enemies and have to get strong to defend ourselves," said Rafsanjani, who remains a powerful figure in Iran as head of the Expediency Council, the top advisory body to supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

He also rejected claims by the U.S. State Department and the New York Times Iran is developing biological weapons with the help of Russian scientists, while defending his country's nuclear programme.

"If a country is not equipped with the nuclear science it can't keep up with the pace of civilisation. Nuclear science is not just about making weapons. It also helps scientific progress in medicine and other fields," he said.

"The Americans are seriously and unfairly seeking to deprive us of our divine rights," Rafsanjani charged.

Americans end up on opposite sides of Mideast conflict

By Laurie Copans
The Associated Press

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM — What do an Israeli peace activist, an adviser to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, a suspected Islamist and a Palestinian human rights lawyer have in common? They are all Americans.

About 100,000 U.S. citizens, either American-born or naturalised, have left the Land of the Free for the Holy Land to form one of the largest expatriate communities in the world.

They have ended up on opposite sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and President Bill Clinton's arrival on a peace mission is bringing those differences into sharp relief.

"He is personally trying to force Israel into a situation which could threaten Israeli security and its existence as a state," said David

Wilder, who moved to Israel from Cleveland and now lives in a Jewish enclave in the Palestinian city of Hebron. "Clinton should stay home."

Some expatriates who support peacemaking, however, hope Clinton can rescue the Wye River accord he helped negotiate.

Jeremy Ben-Ami, a former senior Clinton adviser who moved to Israel, said the president faced a difficult task.

"I think it's really hard to imagine this visit coming at a worse time," Ben-Ami said of the daily recriminations between Israel and the Palestinian National Authority over implementation of the peace accord.

"I'm not even sure someone of Clinton's talents can make something out of this really bad situation," he said.

Many Americans came to Israel in a rush of pride after its victory in

the 1967 war. Some sought to practice their Zionist and religious beliefs. Some just fell in love with Jerusalem's stony hills.

Most of the tens of thousands of Palestinian-American expatriates were born in the West Bank or Gaza Strip and left after 1967 to escape Israeli occupation. They returned with U.S. passports and a greater sense of freedom.

Janet Aviad, who leads the Peace Now group in Israel, said she absorbed her belief in equality while growing up in Philadelphia.

"All kids have heroes and mine was [Abraham] Lincoln," said Aviad, who has often protested Israeli human rights abuses in the West Bank and faced down Israeli soldiers.

Other Americans saw themselves as modern pioneers.

One-sixth of the 420 settlers living in heavily fortified enclaves in the divided town of Hebron are

Americans. The community is considered one of the most militant, with settlers frequently engaged in friction with Palestinians.

Netanyahu himself spent a large part of his childhood and student years in the United States, and is known for the excellent English and media-savvy ways he picked up in America.

His senior policy adviser, David Bar-Ilan, is one of five top aides to Netanyahu who are native or naturalised Americans.

On the other side of the issues is Jonathan Kuttab, a Palestinian human rights lawyer who spent 10 years in Virginia and New York. That time, he said, helped him understand why Americans are generally more sympathetic to Israel than to the Palestinians.

"Most Americans are ignorant of the situation" in the Middle East and Israel does a better job presenting its case, Kuttab said.

Viagra inventor says he feels like Columbus

NEW DELHI (AFP) — The man who invented the sex wonder drug Viagra compared himself to Christopher Columbus, saying his feat was like the adventurer's quest for the East Indies that led to the discovery of America. Simon Campbell told reporters in Bombay Thursday that his research for the blue diamond-shaped pill, the butt of countless jokes and a ray of hope for millions of impotent males, started as a solution for angina.

Woman escapes snake bite in bank shock

SYDNEY (AFP) — A Melbourne woman narrowly missed getting bitten by a venomous snake when she went to her bank for a loan on Friday. The woman, in her 40s, reached into her handbag to pull out a bank statement but to her horror found a deadly tiger snake coiled up inside. She threw the bag to the other side of the room and shot out with the bank official, leaving the 76-centimetre snake locked in the room. "She was lucky she didn't get bitten," said Senior Constable Glenn Ryan who went to the bank and helped a snake catcher trap the poisonous reptile. "She had no idea how it got there."

Snake charmer bitten three times by cobras

KUALA LUMPUR (AP) — The King of Snakes has been bitten three times since he moved in with 150 cobras. "But I am determined to complete the remaining 21 days," snake charmer Othman Ayeah, 31, insisted Friday, after having spent six days in a glass case with the serpents. Othman won the title of World Snake King in an international snake-charming contest held earlier this year. But he's now eyeing a record held by another snake charmer who lived in a cage for 20 days with 100 poisonous snakes.

Burglars steal 8,700 pennies intended for relief

LOGAN (AP) — Thieves have stolen 8,700 pennies that were collected by middle school students for victims of Hurricane Mitch. "What they have is a tonne of pennies," said Cedar Ridge Middle School principal Brian Chambers. "And what they are planning to do with a tonne of pennies, I don't know."

The pennies, stored in a school office, were stolen Wednesday night. Students had been raising the money for relief efforts in Honduras for nearly a month, hoping to collect enough pennies to cover a 1.6 kilometre stretch. They were planning to turn in the \$87 in pennies on Dec. 23, the first day of Christmas vacation.

Photographer arrested for snooping on Cruise, Kidman

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A celebrity photographer was arrested Thursday on charges of illegally listening to a cellular phone call between Tom Cruise and his wife, Nicole Kidman, and selling the details to two tabloids. Eric Ford, 27, was arrested by FBI agents after he was indicted Tuesday by a federal grand jury on charges of illegally intercepting a wire communication and disclosing its contents for financial gain.